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Chair

Mrs. Susan Kadis

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.)): I bring the meeting to order.

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to our meeting today. As you know, the meeting is to confirm our future agenda. I believe you've received the tentative agenda and information as to the next 12 meetings prior to the break and holiday in December.

Primarily, the most important thing today is that we confirm the framework that you have before you. We need a little flexibility in order to bring in some of the witnesses on parental benefits, maternity benefits in particular. I believe I may have mentioned previously that some academics were not able to make it, and we may even have to change the odd time or day for one or two of them. We're working with them right now.

But at this time, as you see on your first page, we're proposing three meetings to hear witnesses on parental benefits—and again, these will be over several weeks. And there will be two meetings to consider a report that we will table, as we have done for the previous four. As well, we are proposing three meetings for government responses to committee reports.

Below that, you will see which witnesses we are proposing. We're interested in your input as to whether you feel they are apropos, or whether there are others. In the case of Minister Frulla, we'll require one meeting—at least that appears to be the case at this point. She's going to report on various issues and reports.

In the case of pay equity, of course, it's the ministers of justice and labour. In the case of the GBA analysis report, it's the central agencies, meaning the President of the Treasury Board, the Clerk of the Privy Council, and the Minister of Finance.

You see on the second page, again, what I've just outlined. We also have two additional meetings where we do not have topics. We're looking at some tentative topics, and I'm interested to hear your input on that as well. Sisters in Spirit is one of them.

Also, I bring to your attention a change on November 2. It's not going to be Minister Frulla. Her meeting has been moved along and will be held very shortly. She will be replaced on November 2 by the expert panel that she has enacted or appointed on GBA analysis, etc. As you may know, there will be a reporting back of the recommendations by the end of November. So I think it's very timely that they come before us next week on Wednesday, for what I guess will be a mutual exchange—a last crack or opportunity for us to express, re-emphasize, restate what we've already stated in our

report, and to get some idea or indication from them of the direction they're going in. I think it will be a good opportunity—again because of the timeliness of it—to reinforce what we have already put forward in this area.

So that's essentially it. We don't have any witnesses for Monday to date, because of a lack of availability, as we haven't been able to secure, as yet, any witnesses on parental and maternity benefits for self-employed workers. Again, there has been some flexibility there.

But that's essentially the framework, entailing or encompassing all of these meetings until December.

Again, our staff do need time to develop the report that we will be tabling on the area of self-employed workers; it's not something they can just do at the end. We're trying to get them in as quickly as possible, as we did with our other reports, so they can begin that process and work within that framework.

I'd like to hear some input from the committee.

Yes, Mr. Powers.

Mr. Russ Powers (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, Lib.): I'm fully supportive of what you're suggesting. There may very well be an urgency to move ahead to develop the report on other parental benefits, but the question I have is about the group that I've noticed is coming in on December 5. Is that at their request or ours? My concern is that we're unnecessarily putting off...in order to develop a report.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Richard Rumas): That happens, Mr. Powers, to be one of the academic experts we've invited. It's Professor Vosko. The problem with the academics is that academic experts are teachers too, and they're teaching classes up until about the time exams set in, so....

She's the only one right now who would be on the 5th. Julie and Lydia and I have spoken about this, and perhaps they will have developed the body of the draft report prior to Professor Vosko, and just in case, we'll hear testimony—

Mr. Russ Powers: It won't hamper aggressively meeting the target we want?

The Clerk: It won't hamper it. No.

Mr. Russ Powers: Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any comments?

Yes, Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I note that a meeting has been scheduled to follow up on the Sisters in Spirit program. As I'm new to the committee, I'm wondering if members have already met with the officials in charge of this program. If so, did the meeting take place prior to the supplementary estimates? Was a report presented? Did the committee meet with representatives of the Sisters in Spirit organization?

[*English*]

The Chair: We haven't met as far as I'm aware. The committee has not met. I believe some people have met them as part of a consultation with the expert panel in Toronto, or elsewhere. Perhaps Ms. Crowder has something to add.

• (1540)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): It came before the committee previously concerning the fact that the Sisters in Spirit was an organization that had asked for money, and there had been substantial delays. We were wanting to hear from them and the minister about its status.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: In that case, I have a question. Would it also be possible to have a representative on hand, and not just the Minister, the Honourable Liza Frulla, to answer questions so as to hear both sides of the issue?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, I think that's very apropos.

Yes, Ms. Yelich.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): I'm curious. Forgive my ignorance, but I thought the Sisters in Spirit had the funding because the announcement was done, the reception was done, and the gifts were exchanged. I saw the reception, so I wondered why we would be going through this part now.

The Chair: It has definitely been approved in principle, in the sense that they are getting the funding. There is no question. The issue is how quickly, from what I understand, and I'm not sure if it will be tomorrow in the supplementary estimates. Apparently there were some issues with the application as well. But it is going in the right direction, and it should be very imminent.

So it's not in question whether they're going to get it or not.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Yes. It's just that the process is sort of interesting. Why would you have the announcement? Now we're restudying the application. Wouldn't the application have been approved when the announcement was made way back in June?

The Chair: Again, my understanding is that it was approved, that it was going to go forward. It hasn't been in question, but there was some delay regarding the application forms.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I've just come back from a conference. I think they think that money is going to flow and flow quickly.

The Chair: Yes. And it would be of great interest to the committee, and that's why I'm very happy to have them come before us as well.

Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): To refresh my memory, I had a couple of questions. In terms of in camera, when do we normally go in camera? Is it when we're discussing things like this?

The Chair: Yes, we have the option. I chose not to go in camera, as did Ms. Neville as well. I don't think it's necessary, and it can be a public meeting.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Okay. Thank you.

The other thing I noticed on this draft is that pay equity is sort of broken up between the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Labour, and then the follow-up on pay equity report. Could you clarify what is intended here?

The Chair: We presently have only those two, the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Justice.

Mrs. Joy Smith: And it's going to be on November 23?

The Chair: Yes, I believe it's pretty well confirmed.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Okay.

The Clerk: It's this far from being confirmed.

Mrs. Joy Smith: So right now, the other spots are left open for suggested—

The Chair: We have speakers and witnesses. We have to confirm the timelines they can make as well. We need a little flexibility there because of academics, etc.

Mrs. Joy Smith: So we're not plugging anything else in on November 14, 16, or 21?

The Chair: We do have openings for two meetings, right?

The Clerk: Madam Chair, in all likelihood, they will be witnesses on the parental benefits study.

The chair was saying many have agreed to come, but it's finding the right date and plugging them in.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I just want to come back to the Sisters in Spirit for a moment. There have been a number of announcements around funding. Early spring was the first announcement. Then I believe the former chair, Ms. Neville, wrote a letter and we did get a response assuring us that it was going to Treasury Board for approval on October 17. The feeling was that there had been substantial delays and that it was important to hear from people about the status, and it would be a good opportunity to talk to the Sisters in Spirit as well, around what their plans and what their issues are. That was the reason we had asked it to come to committee, because of the substantial delays. I think it's important that we continue to hear from them.

While I have the floor, I notice that other studies and issues included a joint meeting of the aboriginal affairs committee on the government response to the report on matrimonial property rights. In view of the Human Rights Commission's recommendation to repeal section 67, I think it would be appropriate that we hear about the matrimonial property rights, because there could potentially be, at some point, some human rights cases that come up around matrimonial property laws.

• (1545)

The Chair: We have proposed that as a potential joint meeting, actually, at this point. We're in the process of communicating.

Nancy is on that committee as well and was the chair of the committee previously.

I don't know if you want to comment on that.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): I'm no longer chairing that meeting now; that's Lloyd St. Amand, but I am still on the committee. We haven't discussed it yet, and I didn't receive a request, up to the time I was chair, for a joint meeting, but I think it would be a very good idea. I think sometimes the difficulty—Anita did mention it to me—was having two committees pursuing the same thing. To avoid duplicating work, I think it would be a good idea to have a joint meeting, and then if there are further issues to be worked on, maybe at that meeting you can decide who would pursue the next step. I would imagine it would stay with aboriginal affairs because it was a study done by them, but those are the kinds of things that I think you would be able to discuss at that meeting.

The Chair: We'll confirm that. A letter will be sent. I didn't know that one was not sent, but we will send one directly.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Would you put me on the list for questions?

The Chair: Yes.

It is a topic of great interest to this committee, as you well know.

Mr. Powers.

Mr. Russ Powers: May I just get some clarification, please? On November 2, will Ms. Frulla not be attending in order to respond to our specific request for these three particular items? Will she be at another meeting?

The Chair: Another meeting, yes.

Mr. Russ Powers: Okay, and the expert panel will be coming to us that particular day in order to basically talk about the review that's coming.

The Chair: November 2. That's correct, yes.

Madame Gagnon.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): On the schedule, I see many blank spaces where there should be names of witnesses to speak about the parental allowance. If I understand correctly, we have not confirmed any witnesses for October 28. Does that mean that if there are no witnesses scheduled, there won't be a meeting, or merely an abbreviated one?

[English]

The Chair: October 28—actually that's a mistake; it's October 26. That's today's meeting.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: I also see that we have yet to confirm witnesses for November 14, 16 and 21.

[English]

The Chair: That's where we're hoping to plug those witnesses in.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: If fewer people than expected actually end up testifying, what alternative solution do you propose to ensure that this committee runs smoothly and does a satisfactory job? Right now, I have the feeling that we're dragging our heels and putting things off until later.

Recently, witnesses broached the subject of child care for self-employed workers. However, members don't get the sense that this committee has a steady amount of work. We won't get around to some issues until December. I'm still searching for a topic that could be the focus of an ongoing study. As a new committee member, I'm disappointed when we meet for only one hour, as we did recently. There are other issues we can work on, such as breast implants, violence and aboriginal women. The year is speeding by. Two work sessions in a year go by very quickly.

[English]

The Chair: We could jump into another topic—violence against women, or poverty—which we do have on our agenda as potential or proposed items that will come before the committee, but we want to finish what we started. We want to have the government responses, and to discuss the government responses. This is very important. A lot of work went into that. I know it was prior to when you were on the committee, but substantive work went into that and into those reports.

I feel that it's extremely important during this phase—and this is subject to the committee—that we go through those very much in depth with the minister and those appropriate, the various ministers, so that we know that our work doesn't go for naught. That is very important I think during this timeframe, as is coming up with a very tangible and substantial report on parental benefits for self-employed workers. That's another very important and timely topic. In fact, I saw an article in the last day or two from the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development referring to this area.

So it is very timely, and I think the fact that we're dealing with it makes a lot of sense. It's really before people right now in a very real way. It's not something for the future. I believe it will be very meaty once we get the next witnesses here. We've had some, and we've had three or four meetings on this. We're expecting another three meetings anyway. Those will be fulfilled. We will have those witnesses here. We'll make some decisions. We'll move on those, take actions in the context of a report. That and responding to the government responses, and deciding if we have other responses after we hear those reasons why we're going in different directions, will I think fill a lot of our time from now until....

We can begin another topic. There are a lot of very important topics. And we haven't concluded by any means. I propose that before we close for the Christmas holidays we set our agenda and have a plan for the beginning of the new year. In other words, don't come back and set a plan, but have it planned already so that we're continuing the momentum.

Madam Demers.

•(1550)

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, thank you for filling in the particulars for me. Since we are the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, shouldn't we be examining in a timely manner important health issues of concern to all women in Canada and in Quebec? Tomorrow, I will be attending a meeting of the Standing Committee on Health where the focus will be on breast implants.

Each year, under the Special Access Program — a program that provides access to medical devices in the case of serious or life-threatening illnesses — Health Canada approves 10,000 breast implants that have not been safety tested. This is an important health issue for women, in my opinion, just as important as programs for parents. If women are not healthy, they will not be able to bear children. Therefore, this matter warrants our attention. The Standing Committee on the Status of Women has a responsibility to review this matter before the minister makes any kind of decision. A decision must be made by January.

[English]

The Chair: Actually, I'm glad you mentioned that, because I was going to bring it to the committee's attention. The meeting of the health committee tomorrow is on silicone gel-filled breast implants. That's Thursday, October 27, from 9 a.m. until 11 a.m., room 237-C, Centre Block, for those who are interested; I'm sure everybody is.

It definitely doesn't preclude us from doing that or from doing something that arises, but I also think we need to adhere to what we said we're moving on now. Otherwise, we're not going to get anything accomplished very expeditiously.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: That's what I'd like to speak to. We knew before we broke for the summer that we were going to study parental benefits. I'm very surprised that the witnesses aren't filled in. Perhaps we can help you to fill them in. Because once December comes....

If you're having trouble now, imagine December. Last year we had a really difficult time.

You're nodding.

The Clerk: Mrs. Yelich, there's no problem with the witnesses after the November break. As I said earlier, it's just a matter of plugging them into the dates.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Yes, well, then you go and you plug in a follow-up pay equity report, which is our minister's. So we should be able to move *them* closer to the Christmas break and keep the parental benefits on schedule. If we're going to delve into it, let's delve into it. Let's get that report done, but done well. December 14 is the day before we leave, I think, or it's very close to the break.

So I would like to see the parental benefits...because we had decided that was first and foremost. As you just said now, we want to

make plans for the next break. If that's the way we make plans, where we don't give it the full slots, then what's the use of making those arrangements that far ahead of time?

The Chair: That is the plan. They would be seen earlier, not at a later date.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: When will the supplementary estimates and the departmental performance report be released?

The Clerk: They will be released tomorrow.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Good. Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just want to support what my colleague is saying. I think it is very important to continue on with the parental benefits. Maybe we can just exchange those two...the pay equity later on in December, and make sure we do a very good job of the parental benefit study, because people are looking to us for some conclusion on that.

•(1555)

The Chair: I concur. The only thing to keep in mind is that some of the academics are not available until December 5. That's the only sort of exclusion there. We do want to hear them. We only heard one academic if I recall—Karen Hughes. But we'll bear that in mind. I agree with you in principle.

Mrs. Karetak-Lindell.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell: I was just trying to get the same clarification that Russ asked for.

On the Sisters in Spirit, I'm still not quite sure when we're trying to have that meeting. Has that been set yet?

The Chair: We're attempting to do that for Monday so we can fill that time in a very important way.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell: That will be on the 31st, instead of the parental benefit study.

The Chair: Yes. We can't do that for Monday.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Around pay equity, since we do have the report now from the government and we need to move some of the parental benefits further on down, it would make sense to deal with pay equity as soon as possible. If there's any way those ministers could actually come earlier than November 23, that would be even better. We have the report before us, it's something we could deal with in one meeting, and it would be off our plate.

The Chair: That sounds like a good idea.

Are there any other comments?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I don't see where there's room. You've got us slotted in, and we have decided to deal with parental benefits.

Ms. Jean Crowder: What about October 31?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: We have the parental benefits study.

The Chair: I asked and it won't be ready for that day. We asked her on many topics, though. We asked her on the supplementary estimates, departmental performance, Sisters in Spirit—for Wednesday originally. We tried to move that up to Monday and it wasn't feasible.

Mrs. Joy Smith: This is just a suggestion. Because the parental benefits are extremely important, because of the commitment we've made here, and because I know we all want to make sure this is set up properly, perhaps we could restructure our committee time to accommodate the academics who we need to come, rather than doing it the way.... Pay equity is very important, but with the parental benefits, in terms of the time we've put into it and the promises we've made, perhaps we could be a little creative when we set up the meetings to listen to these people.

The Chair: Mr. Clerk.

The Clerk: We have tried to do that with a number of them. One academic, Professor Phipps from Dalhousie, will come on the 17th, which is a Thursday, subject to final confirmation after this meeting.

There are three others who you see listed: Professor Fudge, Professor Vosko, and Professor Lero. Professor Lero can't come. Professors Fudge and Vosko can't come before the end of their teaching time, even on a Tuesday or a Thursday. They both teach on Monday afternoons and Wednesday afternoons.

The Chair: So we're trying to be flexible. We appreciate your point. We agree.

Madame Gagnon.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Did I understand correctly that we will be meeting on Thursday?

The Clerk: The committee will probably meet on Thursday morning.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: I'm sorry, but we have other business to attend to. After all, the committee can already schedule meetings on Mondays and Wednesdays.

[*English*]

The Chair: Well, if that's the case, if the committee decides that... I understand we're generally not meeting on Thursdays. It was flipped over to Mondays and Wednesdays from Tuesdays and Thursdays previously. If we want to accommodate their availability, we will have to show flexibility at times. If members don't want to do that, we won't go in that direction, and we won't have that particular witness.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Okay. Find witnesses who can come.

The Chair: Are there any other comments or questions? Any other witnesses on this particular topic who members of the committee may have would be appreciated.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Do you want us to just forward the names of the witnesses to the clerk?

The Chair: Yes.

Are there any other comments? Okay.

I'll take the direction of the committee. I appreciate your input on that. We'll set up the schedule accordingly.

Thank you very much everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.

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