



House of Commons  
CANADA

# **Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities**

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HUMA • NUMBER 031 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, October 31, 2006**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Dean Allison**

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## Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Tuesday, October 31, 2006

• (1115)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)):** Order, please.

Pursuant to Standing Orders 81(7) and 108(2) and to the motion adopted by this committee on October 3, 2006, this committee will commence its study on plans and priorities and continue the one on government funding cuts to Human Resources and Social Development Canada.

The minister and the department will have 10 minutes to make their statements, and a question and answer session will follow. This part of the meeting will go for approximately 90 minutes, and after that section of the meeting the committee will discuss its business.

With that, I would like to welcome the minister here today. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule. We certainly look forward to your opening statement. Then we'll start with one round of seven minutes, followed by a second round of five minutes, and we'll go from there.

Thank you, Minister Finley, for being here today.

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to have this opportunity to appear before the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities to discuss my department's report on plans and priorities.

Joining me today are some of my departmental officials. Starting at the left is Sherry Harrison, who is our HRSD comptroller. To my immediate left is Janice Charette, the new deputy minister. To my right is the deputy head of Service Canada, Hélène Gosselin, and to her right is Karen Kinsley, the president of Canada Mortgage and Housing.

This is our second opportunity to discuss our new government's initiatives since the new department was created last February. As you know, we consolidated the former Department of Human Resources and Skills Development with the former Department of Social Development. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation is also included in my portfolio.

This is a large ministry with a very significant mandate. With over 24,000 employees, and planned spending of approximately \$80 billion, our department is working hard to make a difference in the lives of countless Canadians. We have programs that help Canadians through all the stages of their lives: from maternity benefits and childcare initiatives, to student support; from labour training and support for the homeless, to programs to help older workers and programs for seniors. All these initiatives have a common theme in that we help build the quality of life of Canadians.

In the labour market, for example, we do this by helping to ensure that Canada has a sufficient number of workers to meet the needs of our changing and growing economy. As members of this committee have undoubtedly come to realize during the course of your ongoing employability study, Canada's labour market is strong. But despite the strength of Canada's labour market, too many Canadians with disabilities, recent immigrants, older workers, aboriginals, and low-skilled individuals remain unemployed. As the growth of Canada's labour force inevitably slows due to an aging population, we have an opportunity to tap into this increasingly important, yet underutilized, labour pool.

Across Canada, from the oil sands of Fort McMurray, Alberta, to the fish processing plants of St. George and Blacks Harbour, New Brunswick, a growing number of sectors are facing labour shortages. At the same time, though, we must make sure that Canada has a high-quality work force, with the skills and knowledge to compete globally. We know that globalization is bringing new competitors and new types of competition. In order to effectively compete, we need to raise the skills of individuals to make them more resilient and more adaptable. In order to fully take advantage of the opportunities presented by the prosperity of today, Canada needs an efficient national labour market. We must, therefore, remove the barriers to learning and worker mobility. Canada needs enough workers with the right skills to meet the needs of a growing economy in a competitive world.

Simultaneously, the department administers the government's programs to help some of the most vulnerable in our society. We have a vision for a strong and competitive Canada, where individuals can make choices that will equip them with the skills to live productive and rewarding lives and to participate in our economy and in our society. Budget 2006 announced several initiatives that pursue this vision, Mr. Chairman, and respond to the priorities of Canadians.

For example, since July, parents of children under six have been receiving cheques of \$100 per child each month from the universal child care benefit. About two million Canadian children and their families are benefiting from this new initiatives. We've also increased the pension income credit to \$2,000. Over the next two years, this will put nearly \$900 million into the hands of our seniors. And we've dedicated \$1 billion to the post-secondary education infrastructure trust that will support the provinces and territories in modernizing libraries, laboratories, classrooms, and other infrastructure projects.

We've provided a one-time strategic investment of \$1.4 billion for the establishment of three housing trusts, with provinces and territories, for affordable housing, for northern housing, and for aboriginals living off-reserve.

By January, we'll have implemented the apprenticeship incentive grant, which will benefit up to 100,000 first and second-year apprentices.

We are also working with partners to examine ways we can address and improve upon existing homelessness programs. In the meantime, we extended the national homelessness initiative to the end of March 2007, and have invested an additional \$37 million from funds unspent in the previous year.

And we have recently announced the targeted initiative for older workers. Some \$70 million will be available over two years for a new federal-provincial-territorial program to help displaced older workers in vulnerable communities get new jobs.

For all Canadians, the Service Canada delivery network reaches more communities than ever before. The number of service points has increased by 157, for a total of 477. In its first year of operation, Service Canada paid about \$70 billion in benefits to nearly eight million Canadians.

Mr. Chairman, we are focusing on priorities that will have a positive impact on the lives of individual Canadians and on the Canadian economy. That is why I have a responsibility to establish priorities, ensure prudent spending of taxpayer dollars, and ensure that programs and initiatives falling within my portfolio achieve results for those groups for whom they were intended.

This is a responsible course of action, and what the majority of Canadians expect and demand from their government.

Mr. Chairman, as a responsible and accountable government, we have reviewed our programs and refocused our activities to ensure that tax dollars are invested in programs that deliver results, that provide value for money, and that reflect the challenges we face as a country, now and in the future.

I want to emphasize that as we move forward in addressing the new priorities of our new government, we will listen to Canadians to ensure that our new investments meet their needs and their interests. In that spirit we have already embarked on several consultation exercises. They include speaking to my many provincial and territorial colleagues, and listening to Canadians. For example, we're working with provinces, business, academia, and interested organizations on the creation of a recognition of foreign credentials.

We're getting ideas and advice from business, communities, experts, and parents on how to move forward with our child care spaces initiative.

We are consulting provinces on national objectives, roles, responsibilities, accountabilities, and results for post-secondary education and training.

We will also continue to work with the sector councils on ways to build a strong and flexible labour force in Canada. In fact, a few weeks ago I met with the Construction Sector Council, which has been doing excellent work.

I've also been consulting with my international colleagues. In Toronto, I hosted my OECD counterparts as we updated the job strategy that has guided our efforts for the past dozen years. More recently, I was in Moscow where I consulted with my G-8 employment and training colleagues.

We consult because we want to get things right before we act, Mr. Chairman. A year from now, when we meet once again to discuss the report on plans and priorities, I will be very pleased to report on how these consultations have been turned into action by this government.

Finally, before I respond to the committee's questions, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to thank all of you for the work you've done and continue to do on your employability study. Your work on this important file will provide useful insight into this very elaborate and very complex issue and will inform the government. I look forward to examining your insights on this issue when your study is complete.

In conclusion, the 21st century requires a new approach to the labour market, an approach that acknowledges the need to address the significant challenges we face and the new realities of a knowledge-based global economy and an aging workforce. As Canada's new government, we are committed to exploring and implementing innovative solutions to the important labour market challenges that lie ahead. I welcome your suggestions and input as to how we can best achieve this.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to speak, and I welcome the committee's questions.

• (1120)

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for this opportunity to address the committee. I will now field your questions.

[English]

**The Chair:** And I would like to thank you, Minister Finley, for being here once again.

We're going to get started. We've been on the road, and I've been a little bit flexible with the timing. I know everyone wants to get a chance to ask questions, so I'm going to hold you to your seven minutes and five minutes respectively. You can look over here as we get close to those times and I'll give you the signal for a minute, so we can keep everyone going and get a chance to ask as many questions as possible.

Mr. Regan, seven minutes, please.

• (1125)

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Minister, thank you for coming today.

It was interesting to hear you talk about trying to build for a 21st century economy, which seems remarkable to me, since a very important part of it would be building a workforce and obviously providing for literacy for adult Canadians, when your government has cut literacy funding to the tune of \$17.7 million. It seems to me it's obvious from these cuts and from comments from your government that you've given up on people who can't read and write and who are trying to learn to read and write.

Why else would the Treasury Board president say the government is not interested in doing repair work after the fact? Or why, for example, would you claim that your meanspirited literacy cuts only affect lobbyists and advocates, when that clearly is not the truth?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I would beg to differ with the interpretation, for starters. Literacy is very important. If we're to have a skilled workforce, then we absolutely must make sure that workforce is competent in their literacy and their numeracy skills.

One of the problems we've encountered, and it goes right across a range of ministries, is that over time many of the programs in existence had been allowed to just continue. Canadians elected us because they wanted us to make sure their tax dollars were being spent wisely, and we committed to doing that. We're reviewing all the programs government-wide to make sure they are effective.

One of the areas where we found there were opportunities for improvement was in the delivery of our literacy programs. As we were looking for ways to save Canadians dollars on their tax bill, we said we have to spend responsibly. We want to focus on programs that are going to deliver real results for Canadians in literacy. We want to make sure there are programs that are going to help people learn to read and write, particularly for the workforce.

We are going to be spending over \$80 million in this area. That's just in Human Resources and Social Development. There is also a lot of money being spent by other departments, including Citizenship and Immigration.

We are going to be honouring all commitments that have been made to existing programs. We're going forward. We're going to be focusing on projects and evaluating them on the basis of merit, as to whether they're delivering—

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** I want to thank the minister for her answer, but I do have some other questions, so I'd like a chance to ask them. If we could have short answers, I could ask more questions, obviously.

Minister, you have said you're spending more than \$80 million on a number of initiatives, but in fact this isn't just for adult literacy, as you know. What I'd like you to agree is that your officials will provide us, by tomorrow morning, with a breakdown of federal spending by your department in the area of adult literacy in 2006-07. I don't want it now; I'd like it by tomorrow morning. I don't want to take too much time right now.

But what I would like to know is, if your cuts to literacy aren't hurting Canadians, then why is it that Wayne Baltzer, a 46-year-old in my province of Nova Scotia, who is trying to get his equivalencies, and is weeks away in fact from getting his high school equivalency diploma, feels he's been written off by this government? And why is it that we see groups like Aurora College in the Northwest Territories, and many others across the country that are doing direct literacy training or who are training literacy teachers, in fact being hurt by these cuts?

How can you say you're only cutting lobbyists and advocates? Are you misinformed? Are you misleading Canadians? Are you simply unaware of what's going on?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** We did not say we were cutting where you said. What we said is we're going to focus on real results, and any programs.... We recently had a call for proposals. We are in the process of reviewing all of those applications with an eye to making sure that programs that merit it continue. But we will not be spending money again on, for example, \$82,000 to build a website, or \$300,000 to answer only 300 phone calls a year. We believe Canadians deserve better and that if we're going to work on literacy, then we need to work on it, not on bad spending.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Thank you.

We've heard, Minister, from various groups over the past while—volunteer groups, literacy groups, student groups, and others—that they were never consulted about the devastating cuts that were announced last month. In your own riding, over 800 people have signed a petition opposing the government's ideologically-based cuts to literacy programs.

Earlier this year, you attended a round table in Caledonia in your riding. What was the purpose of that round table? Did you consult with anyone from the Ontario Literacy Coalition, and did you say to them, or anyone else for that matter over the past number of months: "We are looking at possible cuts. How might these cuts affect what you do?"

• (1130)

**Hon. Diane Finley:** We do a wide range of consultations on an ongoing basis. I'm consulting with groups, including all the provinces and territories—

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** I didn't say a wide range of groups. I asked a very clear question. Who did you meet with and actually say to them, "There are going to be possible cuts. How might these cuts affect you?" That's the question, Madam Minister, not what groups did you talk to about all kinds of other things.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** There was a variety. When we speak with provincial ministers and territorial ministers, we do not limit the subject. We take advantage of the opportunity to consult them on a wide range of subjects.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** In other words, you didn't actually say to any particular group, "There's a possibility of cuts and how would these cuts affect you?"

**Hon. Diane Finley:** When we consult, as I say, we do it on a wide range of subjects. Because there isn't a formal definition of expenditure review topics, it does not mean those issues have not been addressed.

But when we look at our internal records and look at where Canadians' tax dollars are being spent, that's consultation internally and that's dealing with the facts.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** So what you're saying is that your consultation is looking at your internal records. To me, that seems bizarre. It seems to me that you're claiming you consulted groups, as you're required to do by your own agreement with volunteer groups, for example, that you signed, Madam Minister, back in April. It committed you to consulting with them. Here you're saying you've done that, but in fact you can't give me one example of a group you met with where you indicated they might face cuts and ask how that would affect them. You're claiming you understand how all of these literacy groups who are facing cuts are being affected, but you can't give one example of where you've consulted one of those groups and said to them, "There's a possibility of cuts to your organization. How will it affect what you do?"

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I would suggest that we keep these statings in context. They actually amount to two-tenths of 1% of this department's budget.

What we will not be spending money on, again, is \$110,000 to develop and print ads about literacy. People know about the problems with literacy. We're not going to pay over \$200,000 to one researcher. We're not going to pay \$33,000 to an executive director for only 90 days of work. That is not helping the literacy cause whatsoever; that's not helping Canadian taxpayers.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Regan.

We're going to move to Mr. Lessard.

[Translation]

Mr. Lessard, you have seven minutes.

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I will restrict my comments to literacy, because thus far, it has perhaps been the most discussed topic in the consultations. There are many other subjects we could broach, but let's continue on with the topic you have just been discussing.

You have said often in the House of Commons or to the committee that it is important to investigate, consult, evaluate, etc. You said it again this morning. I will also comment on the responses you were just given concerning literacy.

With respect to Quebec, I received a letter from the Coalition québécoise against the federal literacy cuts, a letter which was signed by all of the labour confederations, the major community groups, groups that work on literacy and family reunification, etc. I would say that they represent virtually the whole of Quebec's population. The letter says that they are being insulted, because there has not been any consultation and because it is not consistent with the past commitments of the Canadian government. It also seriously jeopardizes the work they have been doing in the field.

When the \$1 billion in cuts were announced on September 25, the Minister of Finance and the president of the Treasury Board said that they were eliminating inefficient programs or cutting the fat.

Madam Minister, which of the literacy programs are inefficient? Where is the fat? People don't know where you are making cuts. Can you specify which programs will be cut? Do you yourself know where you will be cutting?

[English]

**Hon. Diane Finley:** First of all, I'd like to clarify that all of the existing commitments regarding literacy will be honoured, including the entente with Quebec. We are going to be honouring all existing commitments.

Going forward—

● (1135)

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Madam Minister, what are you cutting?

[English]

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I'm going to clarify what wasn't being cut.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** I know that is what you want to say, but the people want to know which programs are being targeted. You have cut \$17.8 million, almost \$18 million out of a total of \$80 million. That's not an insignificant percentage. So, what are you cutting? It must be identifiable.

[English]

**Hon. Diane Finley:** What we do is fund projects, not organizations. There are projects that meet the criteria going forward. They will be evaluated based on their merit and based on their contribution, and then we will be funding them. But as you say, we're going to be honouring all existing commitments. That means we're not cutting things. All we're doing is refocusing going forward, to make sure that there aren't wasteful projects that are being funded.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Madam Minister, if there are projects going forward, it is thanks to the organizations. You say that you fund projects and not organizations, but have you cut funding to organizations? If so, which ones? How are they affected by these cuts? That is what I want to know.

You spoke about your intentions. We are no longer dealing with intentions but rather facts: you have cut almost \$18 million out of \$80 million. What is being removed from what exists at the moment?

You said that what was involved was organizations. What are the organizations that are going to disappear? It is organizations that implement programs and carry out projects. What cuts have you made? Do you know? If so, which ones?

[English]

**Hon. Diane Finley:** We have a number of organizations that provide very good services. As long as they are submitting applications for funding for good programs, we will be funding those programs as long as they meet the criteria. We're not going to fund organizations just to keep them alive if they're not delivering value and measurable results for Canadians. That's not our job. Our job is to promote literacy, not just to create jobs. We want to make sure the funding going forward actually gets the results it's intended to.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Madam Minister, I'm sorry. You said earlier that we were doing good work here. If we are doing good work, it is because we make an effort to be efficient and we don't work in a vacuum.

We want to know this morning whether you are aware of the cuts that you have made. You are the minister and you are the person who took this political decision. What have you cut in literacy? That is what the organizations want to know, because they are the ones who deliver the goods in the field.

[English]

**Hon. Diane Finley:** This is exactly what I'm trying to explain. We have not cut existing programs. All existing commitments will be honoured. It's going forward, as applications for new programs and new projects are made, that we will be applying stricter criteria, to make sure we don't get the kind of waste we've seen in previous programs. That's what we're going to be doing.

We're going to be focusing the money on where it gets done, but existing programs have not been cut. We will be honouring all existing commitments. Going forward, we're just going to be a little more rigorous about making sure that people who apply for programs, who get money for programs, are delivering programs that help to increase literacy levels for Canadians.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Okay. You are saying that you are not cutting the programs. But as you know it is organizations that implement and deliver the programs. You say that you are targeting organizations. How will the organizations be affected by your cuts? Only a portion of the \$80 million is allocated to organizations. You must be in a position to be able to tell us which part that is. What are you cutting? That is what I want to know.

**Ms. Janice Charette (Deputy Minister, Department of Human Resources and Social Development):** I could add something to the question about the cuts to the literacy programs.

[English]

The adult learning literacy and essential skills program has two components to it. There's a component of the program that deals with national projects, and there's an element of the program that deals with local and regional programming.

As the minister said, we've just recently completed a series of calls for proposals. All of the calls for proposals were completed on or before September 15.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Mr. Chairman, I'm sorry, but it is the minister who made the cuts and who took the political decision. I am dumbfounded this morning to see that she can't answer my question. It seems to me that this should be easy.

[English]

**The Chair:** That's all the time we have. We're going to have to catch you in the next round, Mr. Lessard.

We're going to move to Mr. Martin, for seven minutes.

• (1140)

**Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP):** Thank you for coming today, Minister.

I've been around government for about sixteen years now. It has always been my understanding and my experience that the minister in a particular portfolio becomes champion for that portfolio. The minister goes out and consults and pushes forward, trying to get new resources to develop new initiatives and to make sure that ministry is having a positive result in the jurisdiction in which they serve.

I can't for the life of me find anybody who has said that you consulted with them about these cuts, including the provincial ministers, who said they had no consultations with you about the cuts. I would think a minister would want to consider all the good information that's available out there. It just blows me away that, for example, you've cut \$3 million out of the budget of the Canadian Policy Research Networks, one of the most respected and well thought of research agencies in the country.

Given that you are to be the champion of social programs and programs under human resources, why is it that your ministry took the biggest cut of all? I believe it was \$152.8 million. Why would this be the case if you're the champion of social development and human resources in the country?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I'd like to refute just a couple of those issues.

Number one is that the single biggest cut came from Canada Revenue Agency, the single biggest source of savings. Secondly, in a number of areas in which I have led this department, we have brought in new initiatives under social programs. For example, the targeted initiative for older workers was an issue raised by your party and by the Bloc in particular on several occasions. I listened to your concerns, and that's why we came forward with that initiative, as well as the five-week project. These are places where we have led, no question, and where we are delivering new programs to meet the needs of Canadians. I think we have to recognize that.

Secondly, I would argue again that no programs have been cut in terms of literacy. All existing commitments are going to be honoured. It's just that, going forward, we're going to be more rigorous about how we allocate the money. We've already identified—we have several lists—examples of where Canadian taxpayers' money has been spent neither well nor wisely nor effectively in terms of increasing literacy in this country.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** To listen to you, one would actually think you made no cuts, and that these cuts, however substantial.... For example, in literacy, you did cut \$17.7 million. You cut \$17.6 million out of the refocusing of the workplace skills strategy, all areas where you feel you're actually making new investments and new initiatives.

When you met with your colleagues at the OECD, were you aware that Canada ranks significantly below OECD countries in social spending? We spend 17%, compared to 27.2% in Belgium; 27.4% in Germany; 28.5% in France; 28.9% in Sweden; and 29.2% in Denmark. Are you aware that we are the lowest-spending jurisdiction among those countries that you sat down with and consulted with? Did you ask them any questions regarding where it is that we might bump up in terms of some of the cuts that you made?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Actually, we compared notes on a lot of subjects. One thing we discovered was that a lot of people were interested in how we deliver our high-quality programs so cost-effectively. A number of issues came up, particularly our pension programs, CPP, OAS, and the GIS. Other countries were very interested in those because they're facing those challenges now and are nowhere near as accomplished as Canada is. They're certainly not when it comes to value for the dollar and the percentage of our population that benefits from these programs.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** At a time when your government was very pleased about the fact that we had a \$13-billion surplus—if you believe the newspapers, you were “awash in surplus cash in government”—and considering what perhaps you would do in your own personal life with your budget, you wouldn't take all of the money that you have and then put it down on your mortgage, for example. I'm sure you'd look around and see what it is that you need to spend on—if you had kids in university, if you wanted to upgrade the vehicle, or whatever. You wouldn't put the whole thing down on the deficit, on the debt, or on the mortgage.

Given the \$13 billion that's out there, I want to know if you supported all the cuts, or did you fight for any of them to be reinstated or to stay in place?

• (1145)

**Hon. Diane Finley:** There were a number of proposals made for savings, where we could realize savings. On some of them we said no, those are important and we need to protect them, and on others we realized that there was opportunity there because the money wasn't being wisely spent. We owe it to taxpayers to spend their dollars wisely. We have to do that; otherwise we're not being responsible.

Looking at the previous government's programs, we found that wasn't happening. So when we do things like paying down almost a

record payment on the debt, that will free up \$650 million each year for new programs in this country to help Canadians.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** Can you give some examples of where you did in fact fight against some of these cuts?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I wouldn't be allowed to disclose those at the moment, because they didn't happen. Those were things that we decided we had to keep; they were important to us, because it's important to us to help take care of Canadians. We just want to make sure that the money we're spending on it is well spent.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** You will need, of course, to have ongoing independent advice to yourself and to your ministry. So the cut to CPRN just doesn't make any sense. In your own briefing paper, it says that CPRN's distinctive approach to policy research and its particular structure of networks further enhances its ability to access leading experts, research, and knowledge in a range of sectors. It plays a bridge between research policy stakeholders and the public, without playing an advocacy role, and it has developed the ability to move policy discussions into new spaces where constructive dialogue is possible.

Did you read this? Did you listen to any of that information as you made that significant and large cut to an agency that has served government so well for so long?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** We did, and what we concluded was that when we need their expertise, we'll be able to call on them as we call on any other range of experts.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]...because of the cuts that you've made.

**The Chair:** That's all the time you have, Mr. Martin. Thank you very much.

We're going to move to the last individual in this round. Mr. Storseth, seven minutes, please.

**Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I'd like to thank you very much for coming forward today and appearing here. I'd also like to congratulate you on the excellent job you've been doing with this incredibly large and very diverse portfolio.

I'd also like to make sure the record shows, Minister, that this is the second time you've actually appeared before this committee in this still somewhat young Parliament.

I'd like to ask you today a little bit about what I, and I think all parties in this committee, especially in regard to the fact that we have agreed to take an extensive study and look at employability issues, consider to be the biggest challenge facing our country today, particularly in my riding of Westlock—St. Paul—that is, the labour shortages we are facing. It's affecting all parts of my riding. We have a booming economy in Alberta, and many people think of all the great things that are going on because of this booming economy, but the labour shortage issue really is threatening to bring that to a halt. Farmers can't find labourers for their jobs. We have restaurant owners who can no longer find red seal chefs and can't find waitresses. I think it's somewhat surprising to a lot of people that for some of the highest-paying jobs in my riding, the oil field sector can't even find people to fill those jobs.

This is very, very disturbing to the people of my riding. The shortage of skilled workers is a major concern, obviously, right across this country and could have serious ramifications on the Canadian economy.

I'd just like to read into the record some statistics that I found while researching.

According to the Conference Board of Canada, we are facing a shortage of more than a million skilled workers by 2020. That's amazing. What's more, they estimate that my home province of Alberta will face a shortage of over 300,000 workers by 2025. This is very serious.

In my own riding of Westlock—St. Paul, we are looking at 8,000 to 10,000 new jobs coming up in the next five years. I really believe the federal government has to take some leadership in this role. The last federal government overlooked this issue; they didn't see it coming and it absolutely broadsided them. I believe we need to take the time to develop Canada's next generation of skilled tradespeople, particularly in areas such as Westlock—St. Paul that are facing some of these huge shortages.

• (1150)

**The Chair:** Can you table the speech?

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I took the time to listen to Mr. Coderre's improv about his own riding, and I think it's very important. I understand that they don't have any representation in Alberta, but we over here would like to stick up for Albertans.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** We spent all week there.

**The Chair:** Go ahead. Continue, Mr. Storseth.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Minister, could you please explain to me what Canada's new government is doing to further some of these objectives? And would you care to comment on what Canada's new government is doing to help address the current labour shortages?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I thank you for bringing up those—

**An hon. member:** [*Inaudible—Editor*].

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Minister.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank you for raising that issue. Our labour market or job situation today is totally different from what it was 10 or 15 years ago. Back then, if you'll recall, we were in a recession, with way too many people for too few jobs. All of our support systems were built on that basis. Now we're facing just the opposite: we've got too many jobs for too few people. So there are a lot of things we need to do. We need to get more people with the right skills in the right place and we need to enable them to have mobility. Right now there are a lot of barriers to people moving from one province to another to find work because their credentials don't get recognized.

Our government has done several things already in this regard. Number one, we brought in the apprenticeship incentive grant, which will help students get into the skilled trades. We've also got the employers apprenticeship incentive tax credit, which will encourage employers to hire apprentices. There's the tools tax credit as well. In terms of increasing skills, we've done a lot of work on post-secondary education. We're launching a foreign credentials recognition and referral agency, one that will allow our immigrants to get to work in their own areas of specialty sooner and will help people with the right skills to find out they should be coming to Canada and that there are opportunities here for them, and that we'll welcome them.

As well, we brought in the older worker program, because we believe that older workers who have been displaced by plant closures and such in vulnerable communities need and deserve our help. We don't want to retire them early; that would be taking much talent out of the pool, and we can't afford that as a nation. We need to try to give these people the skills and tools they need to get re-employed, to be productive members of society. As well, I'm working very closely with my colleague, Minister Solberg, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, so that we can increase and make more efficient the temporary foreign workers program, so that we can get people here from outside the country to fill those jobs so that all of the projects and programs for which these skilled people are needed can go forward. If we've got people who want to invest in infrastructure and projects in this country, we need to make sure they have the labour skills they need to make this happen.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** You have one minute left.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** All right, I'll try to be brief on this one.

I did take note, astoundingly so, Minister, that it took five Liberal ministers and ministers of state to serve in your portfolio in the last government. I can only think that speaks to your efficiency and competency.

On another note, it also speaks to some of the things people in Westlock—St. Paul are very concerned about: the inefficiencies and duplication and waste that government has traditionally seen over the last 13 years. Could you please tell me what measures you are taking to ensure that departments within your portfolio improve accountability to Canadians?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Oh, gosh, we only have 30 seconds. Actually there are a number of them. We've achieved significant efficiencies by consolidating the five different offices, saving approximately \$5 million a year. In doing that we've actually been able to strengthen our social policy development, because instead of all these different groups working in silos, we're now working together and sharing ideas, because there are a lot of cross-linkages that we need to benefit from. That is exactly what we're doing.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC):** Mr. Chairman, can we ask for a little quiet across the way? It's very disrupting for them to be having this conversation here. There are other rooms. If they don't appreciate the minister taking her time out today to come and—

• (1155)

**The Chair:** Sure, we'll ask everybody to be quiet.

That ends the first round of seven minutes. We're going to be moving to the second round of five minutes.

Did you have a comment, Mr. Lessard?

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Mr. Chairman, when people discuss things like that, it is in order to better understand the debate. I think it's much more constructive than playing with your Blackberry.

[English]

**The Chair:** We're going to move on to the second round.

Ms. Bennett, five minutes, please.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Thank you very much for coming.

I was actually part of the HRDC committee when we recommended that the department be divided.

I guess I want to know whether you, as minister, feel that given this focus on accountability, you alone are able to look after almost half the budget of this Canadian government?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** It's less than half, and a lot of the programs are statutory.

I really believe that by bringing the departments back together we've been able to knock down silos. There were programs going on in one department that were being maybe not duplicated, but at least there were parallel programs going along. We've been able to increase efficiencies that way.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** That's fine, so you think you're doing a great job.

I'm obviously pretty worried about the program that you have called the universal child care program. I'm concerned about its design, in that I think there are lots of people who receive the money and it has nothing to do with child care at all.

Last week your officials said you haven't created one more space, which also means that, separate from the money that's going to

Canadian families, you haven't created the ability for a choice for the people who might want to send their children to quality child care.

In fact, some of the provinces have already said that because you're killing the national child care program they are actually rolling over their budgets to be able to create spaces over time, so it's really our money still that's creating these new spaces. So I want to know what commitment you're making in terms of the 125,000 new spaces you had said you'd create at the beginning. When will we see the first spaces, and when will you be accountable for the spaces that have been created?

Secondly, could you tell me why you've been retrogressive on your so-called universal child care, which I believe is a family allowance, and why that same amount of money wasn't added in to the national child benefit? Also, I want to know how you answer to the people in your riding about the 163 spaces that are now missing because of you killing the child care program.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I hope I have more than 30 seconds to answer those—

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Wait, I have one more then.

What I've heard in Alberta is there are people who are on EI who need to be available for work in order to qualify. The fact that they don't have child care spaces means that they're not available for work and therefore they stay on a program when they actually would rather be back at work because they have no available quality child care. So I just want to know how you'd rather that they were staying on a program or staying on welfare than actually getting child care to be able to go to school or to be able to go back to work?

**The Chair:** Minister, you have two minutes.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me be clear, right from the beginning in budget 2006 we said that the creation of the new child care spaces and the incentives for those would take effect April 1, 2007. We're taking this opportunity to meet with a wide range of stakeholders—

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** You refused to meet with the Child Care Advocacy Association.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** The Child Care Advocacy Association is a 24-year-old organization, with non-profit members, regionally based, launched in 1982, and you've refused to meet with them. Could you tell me that and then say you've been consulting?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** There are some 20,000 different child care groups, stakeholders—

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** This is the umbrella that they have self-selected.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** You asked me to explain, and I'd like to do that if I may.

We said we would create these incentives, so we're consulting with the people who can create them. Our incentives are to be motivating business and community groups to create these spaces. So we thought, all right, who would best know what—

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** It didn't work in Ontario.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** —would motivate these people.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Mike Harris tried that, Minister.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** And that's why we're wanting to consult with them this time to make sure we get it right.

As I said in my introductory remarks, we want to consult so that we get it right before we act. That's why we're meeting with a wide range, including the YMCA, which is one of the largest child care providers in the country. They know what it takes. They provide it for themselves. They also work with business to provide spaces for them. So we're trying to get these incentives right so that those spaces will be created.

Just as a by-the-way, my riding seems very pleased, I know, in talking with the parents. There's over \$8 million in new money in my riding alone every single year to help parents get the choice in child care that they need—

• (1200)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Not if there are no spaces.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** —and they've been very appreciative of those. Those spaces are going to be coming.

**The Chair:** That's all the time we have.

I want to thank you, Ms. Bennett, for that.

Minister Finley, as you know, we've been on the road and you've heard some concerns from the opposition in terms of literacy. The counterbalance to this is that the new program you introduced for older workers had received some accolades from some of the people we talked to on the road, specifically CARP. I just wanted to mention that as some of the other things we've been hearing on the road as well, as we've travelled on the east coast.

Yes.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Is that part of your next five minutes, Mr. Chairman, for the Conservative side?

**The Chair:** I'm not taking five minutes—

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Well, it's a part of it.

**The Chair:** —it was a quick reference point.

We're going to move to Madame Bonsant.

[Translation]

You have seven minutes.

**Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ):** Seven or five minutes?

[English]

**The Chair:** *Cinq.* Sorry.

[Translation]

**Ms. France Bonsant:** I can take seven minutes if you wish.

I am going to speak to you about youth employment. Last year, we worked together with your party on the Summer Career Placements Program. We learned that you wanted to cut 50 per cent of its funding. We formulated 14 recommendations on how to improve the program and help young people embark on a new career. Young people are not big spenders like all of the oil companies you're helping in Alberta, but they need work experience to be able to continue to search for a job.

Further to the simplistic response you sent with respect to these 14 recommendations, how do you think the program can be improved in future if you are reducing its funding?

[English]

**Hon. Diane Finley:** For starters, we are going to be taking, as we have been doing with all programs, a full and comprehensive review of each of our programs, and that's well under way. The summer career placement is one of those. We are very appreciative of the work that's been done by the committee on this, and we're bearing in mind those recommendations.

As I mentioned earlier, we're in a job market, overall, in this country, where there are too few people for too many jobs. And there are many parts of this country—Calgary was brought up, and various parts of Edmonton, but we know they exist right across the country—where there are too few summer students for the number of jobs that exist.

We don't think it's smart to spend taxpayer dollars to subsidize those jobs when they would be created anyway, when those students would be there anyway.

[Translation]

**Ms. France Bonsant:** Madam Minister, what you don't understand is that in my riding, what is involved is organizations, not private companies. The applications I received from literacy organizations, some of which are non-profit, total \$1.5 million. You say that these jobs will be created in any event. That would surprise me, because you are in the process of cutting these programs as well.

I want to know what you intend to do with the 14 recommendations and on behalf of young people in high school, particularly those who live in small municipalities. They want to pay for their education and earn money during the summer in order to further their careers.

I want to know whether that is your final answer with respect to the 14 recommendations or whether you really want to improve them. I am not talking about private companies, because I know they will hire students in any event.

I have another question. Please answer it briefly.

[English]

**Hon. Diane Finley:** As you know, the program helps community groups, organizations, and those.... We're going to help students get jobs where the students need the help to get the jobs, whether it's because they're in a rural area, high unemployment, or maybe they live in circumstances where there's a high crime rate so it's very difficult for them. We're going to put the money where it will help students to get the jobs. We're going to put the focus back on the students' needs, instead of on those of employers who would have hired people anyway.

I come from a rural area. I'm very sensitive to this issue, because I know how hard it was for me to find a summer job, growing up, and my area hasn't changed much since then.

[Translation]

**Ms. France Bonsant:** Madam Minister, I hope that you will take the 14 recommendations into consideration, because even your party worked on them.

The analysts tell us that your cuts will lead to the loss of at least 300 to 400 jobs. Is it the role of the Department of Human Resources to put people out of work?

[English]

**Hon. Diane Finley:** No, those numbers are grossly exaggerated, shall we say.

• (1205)

[Translation]

**Ms. France Bonsant:** The number are exaggerated? Okay. Are you going to cut analyst positions as well?

[English]

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I'm sorry, I misunderstood the question. Could you repeat it, please?

[Translation]

**Ms. France Bonsant:** The analysts tell us that your cuts will lead to the loss of at least 300 to 400 jobs. Is it the role of the Department of Human Resources to put people out of work?

[English]

**Hon. Diane Finley:** No. What we've made very clear from the beginning is that those 300 jobs are across the entire government. Within my department, we're looking at approximately 50 positions over a period of a couple of years. Every single one of those individuals will be given the opportunity to move into another job.

We have about 7,500 people who turn over across the government each year. In 2005-2006 there were about 7,500 people who left their jobs and were replaced. We're talking 300; there will be significant opportunity for people to find other jobs in which to be employed.

[Translation]

**Ms. France Bonsant:** Madam Minister, that's all very well, but the analysts say that there will be job losses and not transfers. There is a difference between transferring people and firing them.

[English]

**Hon. Diane Finley:** There is a normal course of events within government. Jobs are changed as departments change—they're

added, they're decreased. Through natural attrition, these positions will be filled. There will be no displacement of individuals.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That's all the time we have.

I'm sorry, that wasn't the seven minutes; it was the five minutes.

[Translation]

**Ms. France Bonsant:** Okay. Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** We'll move to Mr. Martin; five minutes, please.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** Minister, in answer to questions over the last few weeks you referred to creating efficiencies and cutting the fat. What I'd be interested in knowing is what vehicles or what table of evaluation or efficiency models you used to determine what was inefficient or simply fat. For example, the cuts that you made to literacy will—in the Yukon, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, P.E. I., Newfoundland, and Labrador—actually close literacy organizations with decades of work on capacity building and literacy promotion.

First of all, I'd like to know, if you have an evaluation and efficiency model that you're using, if you would table it with the committee.

Second, here this morning, could you give us some examples of inefficient and fat programs that you cut?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** There are several examples of where people, just by common sense, would say this isn't a wise place to spend money.

Your colleague brought up the notion of the summer career placement program. We were actually providing 50% subsidies to industries and businesses that said they would have hired those students anyway. Now, that's not a good way to spend money. We provided funding assistance for students, a third of whom said they would have got the jobs anyway. That's common sense. We don't need some formal matrix to say "Is this wise spending?" It's not.

So those are areas where we won't be going in the future.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** So there was no real matrix, and in your view summer employment programs are fat.

In my community, I know that when we gave money to the private sector to create summer work, these were some of the better jobs for some of our students. The private sector paid the going rate, and then there was a top-up so that these folks could make a few extra dollars and get some experience in some of the areas they were training for—for example, pharmacy.

Also, I want to focus for a second on the cuts you made to the voluntary sector. Do you not recognize the value of the not-for-profit and voluntary sectors and their ability to deliver programs across the country?

I was at a dinner on Saturday night for the St. John Ambulance in my community. We were there with the district manager and lots of military types around the table—a place you'd probably be more comfortable in than I, perhaps. Anyway, it was great to be there, but they were asking me: “Does the minister understand the impact the cuts are having on that very voluntary sector in our communities that shows up at all of the sporting events to make sure we're all safe, and if we fall down or get sick, we're looked after?”

I'd like to ask the minister, because this has several factors to it, do you believe that the process followed by the government in identifying the savings announced on September 25 respects the accord between the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector signed in December 2001, and is in keeping with section 5.2.3 of the code of good practice on funding, which calls on the government to solicit and consider voluntary sector views on better ways to meet funding needs and facilitate long-term planning in the voluntary sector?

• (1210)

**Hon. Diane Finley:** We obviously recognize the fact that the voluntary sector contributes over 8.5% of our GDP. That's something really very special. As an MP, like you, I'm there every weekend. I spend 95% of my time at functions organized by the voluntary sector. In fact, my department deals on a daily basis—daily, weekly, monthly—over the course of the year with over 20,000 different NGOs. They deliver many of our programs—some on their own, some in partnerships, some through our funding. That's why we recognize the value they contribute.

With respect to funding practices, the Government of Canada did establish the blue ribbon panel to streamline the administration of grants and contributions, and that panel has been receiving feedback from within both the government and the community, particularly the not-for-profit sector, on issues that touch on how to develop a more streamlined and efficient grants and contributions program. We are dealing with them. We are hearing—

**Mr. Tony Martin:** I'm glad you raised the blue ribbon panel, because I've been trying to figure out what vehicle you used to evaluate and to decide what was fat and what was inefficient. It seems to me that maybe you held up the blue ribbon panel and the red ribbon panel and the orange ribbon panel, and the orange and the red just disappeared and all of the blue stayed.

Was this—

**The Chair:** Mr. Martin, that's all the time we have. Maybe we'll be able to catch you—

**Mr. Tony Martin:** Can I just make one short comment?

**The Chair:** Sure, but very short.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** In the voluntary sector that you spoke so highly of, there are 161,000 non-profit agencies across this country, and a big chunk of them will be axed as part of the \$200 million and the \$1 billion in cuts you made just a couple of weeks ago. That's shocking, and should bother you to a point where you'd want to go

back and actually use an efficiency model of some sort and return some of those cuts you've made.

**The Chair:** Thank you again, Mr. Martin.

We're going to move to the last individual of this round. Mr. Brown, you may have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Allison.

Minister Finley, thank you for coming before our committee today and certainly for the stellar job you are doing as minister in a very diverse and large portfolio. It's certainly appreciated by this member.

I'd like to ask you a question with respect to your recent initiatives on older workers. I'm sure you're very well aware of the many opportunities and challenges that exist with Canada's aging population. Right now the statistic I've heard is that one out of eight Canadians is over the age of 65, and in less than 25 years that statistic is going to be one out of five. In a mere 37 years, when Mr. Storseth and I fall into that category, I'm sure it's going to be even larger.

But as Mr. Storseth pointed out to this committee earlier today, Canada is facing a growing shortage of skilled workers. And clearly, as Canada begins facing the labour shortages, we cannot afford to lose that experience of the human capital of older workers, especially those older workers who are left jobless because of industry downturns or are in some communities where jobs are harder to find, because of higher unemployment or because they are reliant on a single employer or a single industry.

Nevertheless, we need to ensure that these workers remain in the labour market and can keep on making an important contribution to their communities.

Minister, can you explain the recently announced targeted initiative for older workers and how it will help achieve these objectives?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Thank you very much for the question. You're absolutely right; we do have these shortages.

We also have too many individuals who are between the ages of 55 and 64 years, who live in communities that are perhaps a one-industry or a one-employer town, and who because of our global economy and other factors are finding themselves suddenly and unexpectedly out of work.

That's unfortunate, and we believe we need to help these people, because they still have a lot to contribute, frankly. We know that from an economic point of view, if they can be employed, that's a good thing. It's good for the country; it's good for them. But even from a health point of view people are better off when they have high self-esteem, when they're working.

That's why we brought in the older workers program, which is a two-year program, to be worked in conjunction with the provinces that choose to sign on, to help suddenly displaced older workers not only develop skills to help them find jobs—and frankly, many of them have never had to look for a job, because they've been with that company for 30 years—but also to help them develop new skills and work experience so that they can find other jobs. We want this program to be run in conjunction with economic development projects in the area.

We're seeing significant examples in Newfoundland at the moment, where while some fish plants are closing other opportunities are being created. While a lot of the people who are being displaced aren't highly skilled, they can be retrained for these new job opportunities.

We're looking forward to working with each of the provinces on this exciting new initiative.

• (1215)

**Mr. Patrick Brown:** Thank you.

On another note affecting older Canadians, I understand that many of our neediest seniors are missing out on the federal income support to which they are entitled, specifically the guaranteed income supplement. In my own riding I've heard of seniors who are not getting the benefit because they don't know about it and haven't applied for it.

Minister, could you tell us what proactive measures the government is taking to inform seniors like the residents I have in my case in Barrie, to let them know and to inform them about the benefits to which they are entitled?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** There is quite a wide range of ways we try to make sure we're getting the benefits to everybody who qualifies for them.

A number of things have happened in the last little while. One is that through our expansion of Service Canada and the number of points of service we're doing a lot of outreach. Particularly in distant communities, where people may not be aware of it, our Service Canada people are going in and seeing anyone who is a senior to see if they're eligible.

Four times a year we send out notices saying please file your income tax—please—or if you haven't done so, fill in the forms to see if you're eligible.

We're also actively looking at new technologies and working with other departments and indeed with provinces and territories so that we can share information on a proactive basis as to who might be eligible to make sure people get signed up in the first place.

And by the way, if any of the members here are aware of anyone who isn't receiving the guaranteed income supplement and should, please let my office know right away.

**Mr. Patrick Brown:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** That's all the time we have. We're going to move to the next round.

Mr. D'Amours.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Madam Minister, I am going to concentrate on only one question. At the end of the day, the answer you are going to give me will also be for the students in my riding.

I hope that you are aware of the fact that you made cuts to the Summer Career Placements Program. In my riding, 344 young people found a job last summer because of this program. This represents a total of \$533,000, which was spent to help organizations and companies in my riding. These young people did 113,000 hours of work in the Madawaska—Restigouche riding.

You mentioned that when all is said and done, some regions don't need student jobs, because they will be created in any event. But what are you going to say to the 170 to 200 young people who next summer will perhaps not have a student job because the program has been cut? What do you say to the non-profit organizations that need this funding? What do you say to the Edmundston Jazz & Blues Festival, which definitely needs funding to continue? And what do you say to the Jeux de l'Acadie, which were held this year in my riding in Campbellton? Is it because francophone organizations have been targeted by your cuts?

Rural regions genuinely need the Summer Career Placements Program. Do you understand concretely what you are in the process of doing? Are your comments about needing to cut the fat still accurate? Does cutting the fat mean cutting programs for students, who are those in society who need these programs the most in order to be able to continue with their post-secondary education?

[English]

**Hon. Diane Finley:** As I mentioned earlier, I come from a rural area myself. I'm familiar with the Edmundston area. Yes, those are the kinds of places that we will be helping, because there are challenges for youth in getting summer jobs. But when it's a retail employer in downtown Calgary, then no, we don't believe the money should go there. So the money is going to be spent on helping students in areas where it's tougher to get a job, in rural areas like yours or mine, areas where there are high levels of crime, or areas where there may be other challenges.

• (1220)

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Madam Minister, when you made the cuts a few weeks ago, did you mention which organizations would be affected by them? Did you mention that a number of jobs would be eliminated in my riding of Madawaska—Restigouche? Never, because you cannot confirm that no jobs will be lost in my riding.

At the moment, 344 young people have an opportunity to advance. There should be 1,000 student jobs in my riding, but that is not the case, Madam Minister.

I therefore believe that it is a serious problem, and that you have sent a negative message to the population, to students and to non-profit organizations.

I would now like to know whether you always wait until the last minute—one or two days before the deadline—to renew the employment insurance pilot projects.

Is your government in favour of eliminating weeks of waiting for unemployment insurance? That's an easy question, Madam Minister. Please reply with a yes or a no.

[English]

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I'm sorry, there were about three questions there. I'd like to deal with the first one first.

We are preserving. We'll be going forward with \$45 million to help employ summer students this year.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Madam Minister, it's a comment I made to you earlier. I would like you to answer my question about eliminating weeks of waiting. Is your government in favour or not of eliminating weeks of waiting for employment insurance?

[English]

Yes or no?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** There is a waiting period. It's because there is an obligation on employers to provide—

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** So your answer is no? You don't want to say yes.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** We have no plans to cut the waiting—

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to give the rest of my time to Mr. Regan.

[English]

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Minister, when Canadians hear the phrase “value for money”, they think now of the cuts that you've announced to literacy programs, youth employment, and so forth. You've been asked in the House of Commons numerous times whether the supporting communities partnership initiative for homeless people will be extended beyond 2007. Your response has always been to talk about value for money. Is that code for notice that it will be cut?

Can you commit here today that this program will continue after March 31, 2007? I would like a simple yes or no. I don't have much time. I have another one I'd like to ask.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** What I have said repeatedly in the House, and every time I've been asked this question, is that for seven years there have been no changes to this program. We want to make sure it is the best it can be. We extended it in the early days. We've added \$37 million to it. We recognized there may be a need. And going forward—

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** So you won't answer the question.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** —we will be making a decision so that—

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** In due course, you're going to decide. You're not going to tell us now. Okay.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** —we can provide a program that's at least as good a quality—

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Let me ask you this, then.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I'm surprised you wouldn't want us to look for better options.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Mr. Chairman, it's a good program, and it's important that it continue.

This is the last question. You talk about value for money all the time. But according to your own expense report, you spent \$2,222.56 of taxpayers' money, and your press secretary claimed more than \$1,100, to travel to Winnipeg to present what your own office called a “symbolic cheque” for \$100 to a Winnipeg family.

In your view, first of all, was that value for money? Secondly, could you see how Canadian taxpayers might view that as wasteful and hypocritical?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** We wanted to make sure that the universal child care benefit was well known so that all Canadians who were eligible would apply for it. We have the choice. We can do that through earned media, or we can do that through bought media. Quite frankly, \$3,000 doesn't buy you much air time. We did raise awareness considerably about this program, because it made the national news. As a result, a lot of people applied for this program. We were able to very effectively and very cost-effectively reach a lot of parents who might not otherwise have applied to this program.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Lessard.

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Madam Minister—

[English]

**The Chair:** Sorry, Mr. Lessard, that was my mistake. It's back to Ms. Yelich. I was getting ahead of myself here. It's still five minutes for you, though. You'll be up next.

• (1225)

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to say that you have a huge job and that you are doing a very fine job. It's a large department. It's challenging, and after consolidation it is more so. Given what's happening in both the economic and labour areas today, I think you have done a lot of hard work. So I would like to congratulate you.

I want to talk a little bit about post-secondary education. We find that the Liberals forget that sometimes they can be quoted as well. Their own competitiveness critic, Belinda Stronach, once stated that under the Liberal government, post-secondary education was “the poor second cousin in public policy, and the country will pay a price for that lack of vision”. Ms. Stronach went on to note that abandoning education was “a reflection of Liberal priorities”, though, as Ms. Stronach has admitted, the Liberals didn't set the bar high after 13 long years in power.

I was wondering, Minister, could you please speak to our government's commitment to assisting post-secondary students?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** It's actually worse than you acknowledged. In fact, the previous government cut \$4 billion out of post-secondary education. Quite frankly, I think that's grossly unacceptable.

In line with our strategy for developing a workforce that is skilled and responsive to the changing needs of the labour market, that's why we are investing in people. In fact, during budget 2006 we made \$1 billion available to colleges and universities across the country for infrastructure. We made scholarships and bursaries exempt from federal tax for students. I mean, they earn the money, let them spend it on education. We made Canada student loans more accessible for more Canadians. As well, we provided a textbook tax credit for all post-secondary students.

There's an aspect of post-secondary education that too often gets ignored, particularly when I am asked questions by the opposition. And that is the whole issue of the skilled trades and apprenticeships. As I outlined earlier, we have a number of programs we've brought in: the apprenticeship incentive grant, the employers apprenticeship incentive tax credit, and the tools for tax deduction. All these things are to help Canadians, particularly young Canadians, get a start and have better access to post-secondary education. Going forward, people are going to need a much higher level of education to get started. Then, over the course of their lifetime, they're going to need training and skills upgrading. As they live longer, work longer, and technology changes, they're going to need to change careers, perhaps more than once; they may even want to.

That's where our commitment is. It's in helping people develop the new skills they need to stay in the job search, to advance, and to even change careers if they so choose.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** Thank you.

I would like to note that I met this morning with representatives from the university, and they applaud you on some of your initiatives, particularly the tax deductions, and not taking income tax deductions on the grants.

I also want you to talk about Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. I believe that you and indeed all Canadians recognize the importance of housing and improving the lives of individuals and families. Could you explain what measures Canada's new government has undertaken to demonstrate its commitment to all Canadians to support access to safe and affordable housing?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Well, thanks.

We have done quite a bit already, if you consider that the House has only been sitting since April for this new government. We've set up trust funds for \$1.4 billion, and that's three trust funds for affordable housing with the provinces, in the north, and also for aboriginal off-reserve housing. And that's on top of the \$2 billion a year that CMHC spends to help over 600,000 families in terms of social housing.

We extended the national homelessness initiative. We added \$37 million to that because we believe it's important that Canadians have access to housing that is safe and reliable.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Lessard.

• (1230)

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Madam Minister, I listened attentively to your answers and have come to the following conclusion. Virtually all of the organizations involved in the affected programs have sent us enquiries. I spoke to you earlier about people who were concerned about adult learning and literacy. There is unanimity on this. Others are concerned about social housing, research into policies, partnerships for social development, youth employment, workplace skills, research and public policies. There are still organizations that can put forward and implement programs. Now you have been telling us this morning that the cuts do not affect programs but organizations.

Madam Minister, are we to understand that the goal of these cuts is to take away from organizations the means at their disposal to propose, implement and evaluate programs within a appropriate structure? I would like to know, for each of these budgets, what has been taken away from the organizations. I must tell you that I am absolutely flabbergasted that I have not been able to obtain these details this morning. As the minister, you are the person with authority in this area and you are the person who took the decision to make these cuts.

[English]

**Hon. Diane Finley:** What I said was that as a program we fund projects. I'll repeat that, we fund projects, not organizations. If I said anything different earlier, then I apologize.

That being said, we want projects that will meet our criteria. They have to be results-oriented. They have to provide value for money. They have to be aligned with our priorities of developing literacy, and as we go forward we will be having criteria evaluations that meet the federal—

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** I apologize if I misunderstood you. However, I wouldn't want you to be allowed to give me an answer that has nothing to do with my question. You have been telling us that it is programs and not organizations that are affected. We were under the impression that it was the organizations. Behind all of the programs, there are organizations. Earlier on, I asked you a question about literacy. I wanted to know what cuts had been made in literacy. You answered that you were not touching the programs but the organizations.

Whether what is involved is literacy, the Summer Career Placements Program or the Supporting Communities Partnership Program, I would like to know what has been affected. Is it programs, organizations or both at the same time? People are waiting. People write me every day about this. I have a whole pile of letters here. One of them is even addressed to the Prime Minister. Another is about the social partnership. Almost every literacy organization has written. People want to know what is happening. They want an answer this morning.

Madam Minister, for more than an hour, we have been asking questions. And yet my colleagues and I still do not have an answer. In your budget there are cuts totalling \$152.8 million. What have you cut?

[English]

**Hon. Diane Finley:** The single largest chunk of that \$152 million comes from CMHC, and it's simply the savings we'll be realizing because of decreases in the expected inflation and interest rates. There have been no program cuts there whatsoever. So let's set that aside for the moment.

But as I tried to explain earlier—and perhaps I wasn't as effective as I might have been—all eligible organizations right across this country will be invited to submit project proposals, and these will be assessed on the basis of merit, particularly with an emphasis on achieving concrete learning and literacy outcomes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Madam Minister, may I—

[English]

**Hon. Diane Finley:** We want programs that will deliver results. I'm not worried about whether a given organization...[Inaudible—Editor]. What I'm worried about is getting literacy training to individuals.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** I do not want to embarrass you, but we want to know where your cuts are. Your answer is not at all an answer to the question we are asking. You are saying that most of the cuts affect the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation Program. That accounts for \$45 million, which leaves \$107 million, which is not insignificant. Other organizations have been affected as well. Even within the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation Program, we don't know what has been cut.

I repeat: I do not want to embarrass you. The fact is that within each program, people work in the field, often on a volunteer basis, to improve things. They have forged ties and developed social solidarity, but they suddenly find that their funds have been withdrawn. They want to know how their activities will be affected by this.

Can you tell me what has been cut?

• (1235)

[English]

**The Chair:** We're almost out of time here, so just a quick response, Ms. Finley.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** We are still spending over \$80 million a year on literacy programs, we are still investing in affordable housing,

and we're investing in the homeless initiatives. What we are doing is spending the money wisely on programs that deliver real results for the people who need it: for the homeless, the illiterate, and for those who need social housing. These are the people we are focusing on. We are going to help them, but we are not going to help others who aren't contributing to easing the burden that those vulnerable people are carrying.

**The Chair:** That's all the time we have. Sorry, Mr. Lessard.

We're going to move to the last questioner today. Mr. Van Kesteren, you have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for coming here.

This is not my normal spot on committee, but I find it most interesting. I've learned much and I appreciate the time you've taken. I appreciate the candid responses you've given us.

I'm interested, Minister, in communities, and I think we all are. We all agree that communities are what make up this great country, and we recognize that government has a strong role in building communities.

Could you explain to this committee what your vision is to facilitate stronger communities? Furthermore, can you explain what your role would be in facilitating that vision?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** This is a very broad question, and I thank you for it.

As I just mentioned, one of the key things is to make sure that our people are housed safely and reliably. So we have to make sure that the homeless are taken care of. We have to make sure that there's sufficient affordable housing, and we've heard a lot of talk about it for years. But we're actually delivering on these programs with another \$1.4 billion in affordable housing, because there is a shortage. We recognized that in the early days; we're making a difference.

We also need to work with the voluntary sector that contributes so much. As I mentioned earlier, they deliver a lot of our programs, particularly through, with, and for Service Canada. We have a voluntary sector council that meets on a regular basis to provide us advice on just how we can do those things. We also have to make sure that the vulnerable in our communities are taken care of. That's a responsibility we have.

So it's initiatives like the employment insurance compassionate care benefit, which we expanded, that are good. These things mean that terminally ill patients are no longer restricted, as they were under the Liberal government, to having only immediate family receive the EI benefit for taking care of them. Because so many people don't have immediate family or immediate family nearby now, anyone of the patient's choosing can receive the EI benefits to provide care for the terminally ill patient.

This is part of our social commitment to Canadians. It's helping the vulnerable by making sure they have the basic standard of living and access to government services and programs. That's why we expanded our outreach for the guaranteed income supplement, because not enough people were getting access to it.

There's a whole wide range of things that help build a community, but we have to take care of the most vulnerable within it first. That's what my department is focused on doing.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** I'm hearing that your commitment is to doing the right things. You stated earlier that we saw a billion dollars in cutbacks on a budget of \$210 billion federally. Did you say that your budget in the HRDC is \$70 billion?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** It's eighty.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** It's eighty? That was close to Ontario's budget, I think. Remarkable.

We have a commitment from you, then, that you're going to continue on in these programs that are important to Canadians, programs that are working, but I would assume.... What was your portion of the cuts? We cut \$1 billion, and how much did we cut from HRDC—\$288 million, was it?

• (1240)

**Hon. Diane Finley:** It was \$107 million over two years.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** That represented more than one-third?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** It was a very small portion. It was \$107 million over two years.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** We can see, then, that in a large budget like that there must be some areas in which we can give Canadians better value.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I'd be surprised if there weren't, just because of the sheer numbers. If you think about your own personal budget, can you cut out a coffee a week? Because that's just about what it works out to. There has to be room for improvement. I would suggest to my honourable colleagues that I'm surprised they don't want to see things evaluated so that they can become more effective.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** We can expect from your department that we're going to continue to do those things and make sure that we give Canadians good value, but we will continue to keep those things that are important and important to building strong communities as well?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Absolutely. Strong communities and strong families are really important to us, because they are the backbone for our whole society, quite frankly. If we don't have those, then we're in trouble. That's why we have our choice in child care plan, because we don't believe that one size fits all. We respect the parents.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Van Kesteren.

I want to thank you, Minister, and your staff for being here today and answering all of our questions. We understand how busy you are, so thank you once again for being here.

We're going to take a few minutes for the room to clear, and then we're going to get to committee business. Okay?

• (1245)

**The Chair:** We have before us today almost 19 motions that we need to deal with. I understand we agreed, when we looked at a motion by Mr. Brown, that the first four motions before you would be set aside until after the employability study. However, there are still an additional 15 motions we need to have a look at. I'd like some direction on how we should move forward.

Mr. Lessard.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** In connection with the order of precedence, I propose that we begin with the motion we proposed and which reads as follows:

That the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities give priority consideration to Bill C-257 (replacement workers) and that a work plan be adopted no later than November 2, 2006.

[English]

**The Chair:** In the past we've taken motions in the order of precedence, in the way they've come in. We've talked about the first four motions being removed until after the employability study is done. I am proposing that we look at number five. Mr. Lessard is suggesting we move to his motion, which is number 16 in the order of precedence. Are there any comments on that?

Mr. Lessard.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** I respect your opinion, Mr. Chairman, but the committee controls procedure in terms of establishing an order of precedence. Under the circumstances, I think that my motion is altogether appropriate.

[English]

**The Chair:** You're making a formal motion to move number 16 to the forefront of the debate. That will open the floor for discussion on that.

Mr. Lessard.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Mr. Chairman, I raise a point of order. A motion on this order cannot be debated. It is immediately voted upon.

I refrained from arguing.

[English]

**The Chair:** This motion is debatable because we're changing precedence.

Ms. Yelich.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** Ours are first, so can we debate them first? I would agree to debate all four at once but vote on them separately. I think we should be going in order of the motions as they have been recorded, but we will agree to debate all four because all motions should be debated.

**The Chair:** Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** My understanding of the priority of business before this committee is that we deal with estimates when they're tabled—they come here and then we deal with them. Secondly, any bills that are passed in the House and sent to committee are dealt with as a priority. Is that not correct?

• (1250)

**The Chair:** There are requirements, and we have 60 sitting days to get back. Obviously that is a priority. Mr. Lessard is asking whether we should move it up in the order of precedence. That's what we're debating right now.

Mr. Storseth.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm in favour of listening, but I'm not in favour of moving this motion before some of these things we've put forward that we think are very important. For example, there's Mr. Lake's motion that he's not here to speak on today. But there's the Canada Pension Plan disability benefits, and I think it's very important that we give some of these things precedence. We've had them on the order paper for some time now and they're ahead of this motion. I think it's very important that we address these other motions first.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Lessard.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Mr. Chairman, I am prepared to debate its merits, but the fact remains that on page 450 of Marleau and Montpetit, it is clearly stated that such a motion may not be debated.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Lessard, it is my understanding, from talking to the clerk, that this is not a superseding motion. We are in motions now, which are debatable and amendable. You're suggesting to the committee...and we're having the debate now as to whether that should be moved up in order of precedence. As you stated earlier, our committee is master of its own design in terms of direction, so that's what you have put forward right now. We're going to discuss it, and when everyone has had something to say, we'll have a vote on it.

Mr. Coderre, please.

[Translation]

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In my view, when the House asks parliamentarians to study a bill, that should constitute a priority. I will save my comments on the motion for later, but I think that for the time being, the important thing is for this motion to be given precedence over the others so that we can debate it immediately. I request a vote on this.

[English]

**The Chair:** Are there any more comments?

All right, we'll call the vote.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** All right, Mr. Lessard. We will move your motion up in order of precedence and now we're going to discuss your motion.

Do I have anyone with comments? Ms. Yelich.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** I'd like to make one.

I would like to see it handled after the break, because next week we're travelling. We are studying employability. This bill does have a deadline, although it is in March, so we know that it already has a deadline. I don't know why it's given such priority. However, I understand that he does want to have it here and studied, so I would like at the very least to be considerate and push it to our first meeting after the break, or our second meeting right after the break. That's not that long. We're gone all next week. I want to be here when we study Bill C-257, so I would like to suggest that we do it immediately after the break.

I think in the best interests of this committee.... We are studying employability. It was high on everyone's agenda. You know, we keep getting diverted with different people's interests. I do want to see this be considered, and we will support it if it can be studied immediately after we get back.

**The Chair:** What you're suggesting is you do support Mr. Lessard's motion of being able to look at it, but you're proposing an amendment. Is that what I hear you saying?

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** Yes, immediately—

**The Chair:** To look at it on.... After break week, it's the 21st and 23rd, so you're suggesting that we meet on say the 23rd to discuss as a group the work plan. Is that—

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** Yes, that would be my motion.

**The Chair:** Okay, so the motion to amend is that we would look at.... Okay, we have a clarification.

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** No, because I'm totally in agreement that when we come back we should right away start to put up a work plan among ourselves and then build up all those meetings on Bill C-257. We are coming back on the 21st—

• (1255)

**The Chair:** That's correct.

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** So on the 21st, immediately after we come back, we should be working in sessions to build up that work plan.

**The Chair:** So the proposed amendment then is that....

Mr. Lessard.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** I believe, Mr. Chairman, that we should instead add some meetings to the committee's work so as to be able to specifically debate this bill, to maintain a steady pace and not to jeopardize the important files on which we are currently working. I believe that beginning next week, we could easily add two meetings per week to devote to the bill.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay, we have an amendment here to look at sitting down when we get back from the break, on the 21st, to start developing a working plan and what that would entail. I believe part of that working plan would be whether we're going to add additional days. We have to come up with lists of witnesses and other kinds of things.

Do we have any more comments on the proposal? Mr. Regan.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** To be clear, Mr. Chair, I think what you're asking, as I understand the motion to amend, is to add a 1 after the 2—that's of November—so 21, not 2. That's what you're doing.

**The Chair:** That's pretty much correct.

Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** I just want some clarification. I believe Mr. Lessard is recommending that we set up a separate committee to look at this bill, which would allow us then to move forward with the already scheduled business of the committee.

You'll note on the calendar that on November 21 and November 23 we already have scheduled in a couple of items—a study of the social economy initiative, which has been cut severely by the government in the last few weeks; and a study of poverty, of the people out there in the country who have been affected very directly by the cuts.

I would ask members of the committee to consider that. We've bumped that twice now, and I would like to see it stay on.

I'm going to be supporting the recommendation that I think Mr. Lessard made, which is to have a special committee, or a subcommittee of this committee, to deal with the bill.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Martin.

I don't believe his motion.... Although Mr. Lessard may have some thoughts on this, what he was talking about was putting a working plan in place.

We're going to go to Mr. Storseth, Mr. Coderre, and then back to Mr. Lessard.

Mr. Storseth.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We have a lot of very important issues coming forward. I believe the motion is not necessarily to start talking about the working plan here right now, today. I agree that if we are going to do this, we should take this and make it a priority to start the working plan together on November 21, our first meeting back. Then we can discuss this, whether it's through a special committee, extra meetings, etc.

**The Chair:** Mr. Coderre.

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** I think Mr. Martin has a valid point. My only question, though, is did we already ask the witnesses to come on November 21 and November 23 with regard to poverty and the social economy?

**The Chair:** Not formally at this stage, so we have some flexibility.

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** Are you okay with that, Tony?

**The Chair:** Mr. Lessard, and then Mr. Martin.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** I apologize to our colleague. I am perhaps the person who misled him about the committee.

First of all, the motion under consideration ought not to be misconstrued. The idea was for a work plan to be adopted no later

than November 2. It is now Thursday. My understanding is that we would decide to do that today. For me, that is not a problem.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to state our position to you. When the committee sits again, the people will not be those who are here today. They will be those who have presented arguments about the bill and who want the work to be done more efficiently. That is why I think that we could add meetings to the time already scheduled for the committee. If the other parties are willing to do the same, that would free up quite a bit of time and accelerate the work. In addition, I do not think that it is necessary to wait until November 21 to do so. We could begin this week or next week.

● (1300)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

I think the proposal is that we meet on November 21 to discuss some of these other potentials.

Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** Just for the committee's edification, the groups who were contacted at some point by the clerk as well to come forward for the social economy initiative and the poverty study have been bumped twice now. They were ready to come in June and again in October, but because of the cuts we bumped them back.

They've been out there, waiting to come. They may not have been formally scheduled, but they're waiting.

**The Chair:** Mr. Coderre.

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** Since the motion said that we should on November 23...because I was asking for clarification; I was not amending your amendment.

The amendment is that, instead of November 2, November 23 we will work together on the work plan. I would say that we keep the witnesses, and that at the end of the session on November 23 we take half an hour to decide amongst ourselves what the work plan should be. But then it means that any other session from human resources will be based on Bill C-257.

**The Chair:** Well, that will be determined by the committee in terms of the work plan.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** That's to be determined, then. Can we pass...?

**The Chair:** Once again, Ms. Yelich's motion is that we replace "November 2" with "November 23", to come up with the working plan. Is that correct?

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** Yes. Let's vote on that.

**The Chair:** Hold on.

Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** In that half hour from 12:30 to one we will do that.

**The Chair:** Okay.

That is the amendment. If there is no more discussion on that amendment, let's call the vote.

(Amendment agreed to)

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** Now can we deal with the main motion?

**The Chair:** Now we need to call a vote on the main motion, as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** I didn't even vote yet.

**An hon. member:** You had your voice.

**The Chair:** We'll save it for later.

Okay, we have some other motions before us.

Ms. Yelich.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** Yes, I'd like to combine all four of these motions, if we can, and Patrick can speak to his.

**The Chair:** Would you number the motions for us so we know what you're talking about?

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** Yes, of course. I would like to do that for you.

In my first motion, I would like to have effective and efficient spending:

That the Human Resources, Social Development, and Status of Persons with Disabilities Committee recommend the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development review existing programs and initiatives to ensure they provide effective and efficient use of taxpayers' dollars.

**The Chair:** What number is that, just so we are all singing on the same song sheet?

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** It's the first one.

**The Chair:** No...in the package that was handed out to us.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** It's number 10, and I would like to have a recorded vote.

Given the minister's appearance today and by listening to some of the questions she had to answer, I think this is very timely. Perhaps the motions I'm putting forward would certainly help us shed some light on some of the decisions she has come to.

I would also like the next one, which is number 11—so numbers 9, 10, and 11 on the sheet you're working with. I'm working with, first of all, the effective and efficient spending. The second one, notification—

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Can we do them one at a time, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** Most definitely.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** We're doing number 10 now, aren't we?

**The Chair:** We're at number 10 at this particular time.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** On number 10, Mr. Chair, the minister has had 9 or 10 months now, and we heard from her that she's been reviewing programs and that they've been reviewing programs and so forth. She is already supposedly doing this. She hasn't consulted. I don't see anything here about consulting, frankly. That would be a better motion, it seems to me. At any rate, I don't see the point of asking her to do what she claims she's already doing. It seems to me this motion is a waste of time.

• (1305)

**The Chair:** Okay.

We have a motion before us. Are there any other comments on number 10?

Mr. D'Amours.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Mr. Chairman, we were to discuss the review of existing programs and projects to ensure that taxpayers are getting value for money. This morning, the minister appeared before us for almost two hours. We asked her which projects or programs were being cut and she was not even able to answer even one of these questions. The committee asked these questions.

We are now being asked to evaluate something that we know nothing about, given that the minister has refused to answer us. I think that this motion is rather incoherent. This problem will have to be dealt with if we are to be able to work. We have not even been provided with the required documents.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** I'm asking for a...

**The Chair:** Hold on for just a second.

I'm going to Mr. Lessard, and then Ms. Yelich.

Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** I too am disconcerted over this proposal. First of all, we recommended to the minister that she herself examine the program. She can do it. She doesn't need us, all the more so as she told us this morning that she could make cuts without prior consideration.

Mr. Chairman, are we going to be considering a question that has already been dealt with? There's something about that that is not logical.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay. Is there any more discussion?

Ms. Yelich.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** If you notice, all the motions are working together. We're talking about no duplication, we're talking about measurable benefits and effective and efficient spending, so that we ourselves can study it, along with the minister. We are talking about the new programs that have been in question. She has put more money into literacy spending. Let us study these. We're talking about studying, providing, and reviewing existing programs and initiatives. I just want them to understand that I think this would be a very good exercise, considering some of the questioning today.

**The Chair:** Are there any other comments?

Mr. Martin, on motion number 10.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** I think this is out of order. Here we have the parliamentary secretary coming forward with work that she and her ministry should be doing. We heard today that they're not out there consulting. They want to tie up this committee with their work. We have work that we want to do—work that we bring forward as individual members of the House. That's what committees are about, from what I understand. I prefer that we look at work that's being proposed by individual members of the committee, rather than work that the parliamentary secretary is trying to get us to do for the ministry.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** I will ask you to call the question.

**The Chair:** No, not as long as there's debate. Afterwards, I'll call the question.

Are there any other comments or debate?

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** I'd like to make the point that we're not talking about doing her work. We're talking about the way the questioning went today. They weren't satisfied with some of the answers. I would say that this committee would like to see some of her initiatives and programs, to look at how they've been cut. If we looked at these programs in depth, maybe we could satisfy some of the questions. If you watched the line of questioning, it was hardly good questioning.

**The Chair:** Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** With respect to our colleague's comments, I would begin by saying that what is involved is not future programs. We are speaking here about studying existing projects. Then, we are being asked to help the minister understand the cuts. There is a genuine problem here in that the cuts have already been made.

If I may make a suggestion to our friends opposite, I would say that we need to ask the minister to determine why she made these cuts. She must be able to answer that. It is not up to us to determine why she did it if she herself does not know. She is the person who took this political decision. It is up to her to give a cogent response. This morning, she did not have the answers. It is up to her now to determine why she took this decision.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** If there's no more discussion, Ms. Yelich has asked for a recorded vote on number 10.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 4) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

**The Chair:** You also had a request for number 9 and number 11.

● (1310)

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Mr. Chairman, we all have things to do. Can this wait until the next meeting? We're past our determined time and I think we should adjourn.

**The Chair:** Is that a motion, Mr. Regan?

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Yes, I move to adjourn.

**The Chair:** Okay, your motion is to adjourn the meeting.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** No.

(Motion agreed to)

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** Does this mean that from now on we'll close at one o'clock exactly?

**The Chair:** It will be at the will of the committee.

Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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**Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons**

**Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes**

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