



House of Commons
CANADA

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

HUMA • NUMBER 003 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Monday, November 26, 2007

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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): I'm wondering whether we can call the meeting to order. I appreciate the patience of the committee, as we didn't have a meeting last week because a couple of people, chairs and vice-chairs, were away.

The order of the day, to let everyone know, is to discuss future business and the priorities we want to assign for it and how we want to move forward.

Just before we do that, though, I want to mention that we've been approached—there's going to be a formal letter coming on Wednesday, and I now realize that most of you have had a chance, but.... The Canadian Council on Learning would like to host us for a reception on December 10 or 11. December 11 is when the report is going to be released, and what they would like is to have an opportunity for us to hear that report on the 10th, for dinner in the parliamentary dining room as a committee.

I realize people's schedules get pretty busy. It is the last week. I also want to suggest that there may be some associate members who are not here who may be interested in learning, post-secondary education, and some of these things. There will be a formal invitation coming out from Mr. Lessard, Mr. Savage, and myself to set aside December 10, which is the evening.... We would go up right after the meeting for dinner, so we hopefully wouldn't tie up too much of your evening's time but would get an opportunity to hear this report before it formally comes out on the 11th.

We've had a chance to talk to some, not all, and I just want to set that date. We'll have a formal invitation that we'll bring to the committee on Wednesday, to talk about this. Tony, we wanted all to know, for the sake of some of your associates—I'm not sure whether there are some other individuals who may be interested—from the NDP. That's why we wanted to mention that date, and you can get some of that information to your colleagues. They would certainly be invited as well.

Those are the dates we have.

Now what we're going to do is look at future committee business. We could roughly give some direction to the clerk in terms of what we want to handle over the next few weeks and as we move into the new year.

We have a few suggestions on the docket. We have the employability study; we have Bill C-265, which is extending EI benefits and must be reported back to the House on February 8; we have the notion of a poverty study, plus a few other things that we need to look at.

I'm going to get it open now, and we'll take a list. I have Mr. Savage followed by Mr. Martin on the list.

Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I'd be interested in a guesstimate, perhaps, about how long we think it might take to finish off the employability study. I'm not sure whether there's an opinion from staff on that.

I think it would be very important for this committee to have a look at the issue of poverty. It's an issue that our leader has made very prominent and that Mr. Martin has brought up here continually. I think we could do some work on poverty in pretty short order.

As a priority, and I don't think this would take more than maybe four or five meetings, I'd like to have the minister come to defend his estimates. If we could do that in a meeting or two or three, or whatever it takes, I think that should be a priority of this committee. We haven't heard from the minister since before the summer.

It would be my number one priority to hear from the minister, and then finish off employability and move into poverty.

The Chair: Thank you. Let me indicate, Mr. Savage, that the clerk has notified the department. What we'll ask the clerk to do, now that you've raised the issue, is get some dates for us. We'll ask when, over the next three weeks, he's available. The clerk has talked to the department and said that we'd more than likely be asking him to come forward.

Mr. Michael Savage: He knows we meet on Mondays and Wednesdays, and since the meetings have been reconstituted, I don't see any reason why he wouldn't be able to appear before us—in the next week or so, I would think. If necessary, I'd make a motion to that effect.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Mr. Martin, followed by Ms. Yelich.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): First of all, I want to express my disappointment that we had a subcommittee meeting scheduled last week that was cancelled. I don't know about the rest of you, but I have a very busy schedule, and when something is scheduled, I oftentimes have to take something else out or move stuff around so that I can be here. This committee is a priority for me, and I take it very seriously. So when a meeting is scheduled—especially a subcommittee meeting, which I was really pleased to see—and then cancelled without any reason given, it does a number of things that aren't very helpful, one being that I had thought we could, at that subcommittee meeting last week, perhaps have spoken rather directly to the issue of needing to have the minister here before the committee to speak to estimates. In fact, I thought maybe we could have had him here today. We're wasting time when we do this kind of thing. I believe there's a timeline for when we have to get estimates done, and I think it's coming at us very quickly, or we have to report back to the House but can no longer perform that exercise with which we are charged, and which is actually a priority for this committee, because there are lots of things in this very thick book on estimates we certainly would like to ask the minister some questions about.

So I guess I'd like to know from the chair how decisions like that get made, because this could happen again. First of all, the subcommittee was called and then it was cancelled. There was no attempt to explain to anybody why, and that leaves us, in my view, behind the eight ball.

I would like to support the agenda put forward by Mr. Savage, that items of importance to this committee be established. Certainly, estimates and getting the minister before us so that we can speak to him are really important. I think we need to quickly finish the employability study, which we have put a lot of effort, time, and energy into, and get that out of the way and bring it to the House so that it can be used.

Then we should move on to this study on poverty, which I believe all of us have now committed to seeing done. As you've probably all noted, it's becoming a very prominent issue out there in the public sphere, and I think it would behoove us to get moving on that.

So those are the kinds of agenda items I'd like to see us address. However, I thought we could have done that more effectively and efficiently had we had that subcommittee meeting last week, after which we could have come today to the table with a suggested agenda put forward by the subcommittee.

• (1540)

The Chair: Okay, thank you, Mr. Martin.

I have Ms. Yelich, and then Ms. Dhalla.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): I can't agree more with the speakers before me. Definitely, Mr. Martin has brought up several times, and the minister has said, that he really wants to have the poverty study go ahead, and I think he's waited patiently or long enough. So I think we should take his poverty study and definitely put it in the queue.

I think we should get on with the employability study. As Mr. Savage articulated so very well, we have to have Bill C-265 done

before February 8, and then the poverty motion that Mr. Martin has called for.

So I'd like us somehow to stick to that. That's it, and nothing else; we should clear the agenda and do these four things. We should get the employability study done; we should leave some room for the minister, who has agreed to come here, to speak about the estimates, and I don't think there's a problem with that; we should do Bill C-265; and then we should go right into the poverty study.

Can we just stick to that? Is there a way we can confine this so that we don't have any more hijacking of this committee by anything else, but do the very important employability study first and foremost; have the minister here, which sounds like it's a good idea; and then do Bill C-265 and the poverty study.

Can we find a way to put that in stone?

The Chair: We can put it in pencil. We'll see what we can do here.

Ms. Dhalla.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): I just want to echo what I think Ms. Yelich said, along with Mr. Savage and Mr. Martin. I think it's important that we have a focused game plan. We have six meetings left, I believe, including this one. I understand that the subcommittee meeting was cancelled. I was told that by my colleague, Mr. Savage. Perhaps the subcommittee could meet and bring together a game plan for the next five meetings so that we don't waste any more time. We've already had a meeting of this particular committee that's been cancelled as well. I think we're losing time, and there are quite a few things on the agenda.

To echo what Ms. Yelich had stated, there's looking at the employability study; having the minister come, perhaps before Christmas; taking a look at the bill before Christmas as well—I think that would take up our six meetings; and start with the study of poverty when we come back in January.

We saw this morning that Campaign 2000 issued a report card, and I think there are some serious issues that Canadians across the country are wanting us to take a look at.

In regard to the study of poverty, I think it's important that our committee be focused. That is a vast topic. Whether we're going to look at the issue of child poverty or poverty on first nations communities, I think it's important for us, as a committee, to be focused, so that when we do produce a report, we actually have a game plan and something that's going to be concrete, useful, and beneficial to people out there.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dhalla.

I would just suggest that I hope before we leave today we know exactly what we're doing in the next five meetings. We'll make sure that happens.

Mr. Lake, and then I have Mr. Martin.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): I guess I just want to pretty much echo what everyone else has said. We have had a bit of a challenge in this committee with going off in a few different directions at different times, and I think it definitely affected.... We should have probably had this employability study done by now, but we do need to make sure that we finish it off properly. I don't want to rush through this one to get to other stuff. Let's make sure we put a lot of effort and a lot of resources into this. Let's make sure we come up with a report that does some justice to all of the witnesses' testimony and all of the work we've put into it.

Of course, obviously the work from the employability study is going to lead nicely into the poverty study. I think there have been some reports to that effect, and obviously we know they're very closely related issues.

We also have to realize, too, from experience, that we know we're going to be bombarded with PMBs and things, so again, I'm just reiterating the fact that we need to really stay focused on the priorities here. I think everybody's on the same page—having the minister come, finishing the employability study, and getting to that poverty study, and staying focused on that.

The Chair: I have Mr. Martin, and then Ms. Yelich again.

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: I forgot to indicate, and I put a resolution in to you, that I'm recommending that a subcommittee be struck to deal with issues on persons with disabilities. That shouldn't take away from this committee. We've done this before, where a subcommittee has been struck to look at issues. All of us, I'm sure, are hearing from members of the disabled community across Canada. They're anxious to have some of their issues addressed. There were roughly 300 delegates here last week from about 90 organizations from across the country, and they were asking for and in support of a subcommittee to begin to look at some of the issues that are confronting them. We haven't done much on that for quite some time, so that would be one recommendation I would make.

Chair, I guess I'm asking for your thoughts, when you get a chance, on how we're going to nail down the agenda today and speak to some of the pieces, as we see it, coming together, and how that might be scheduled so that we can get as much done as soon as possible.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

I have Ms. Yelich again.

What I'm thinking is that I said February 8, but in talking to the clerk for the private member's bill, he does not have to report it back until March 5, so quite clearly we'll leave that one to the new year. We'll have time in February to deal with that issue.

That takes us back to dealing with the employability study, the estimates, and then I think, Mr. Martin, before we leave for our Christmas break, we should produce and have a subcommittee meeting to talk about speakers and witnesses for the poverty study and the shape you want that to take.

Ms. Yelich, and then we can maybe flesh out the other two things.

I'm also reminded by the clerk that supplementaries must be reported by the end of next week, so it's very timely. I'm going to suggest that we ask the minister to come on Wednesday. If the minister is not able to make it on Wednesday, I suggest that we look at starting with the employability and then we'll fit him into next week's schedule.

Ms. Yelich.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Ms. Dhalla brought up an interesting comment about the poverty study. She talked about poverty among children and poverty in families. I would like to see exactly what the parameters of our studies will be so we can get engaged. However, I think that's a good place to put our disability study as well.

I don't believe in subcommittees, because I think we're all part of this committee. I think we want to be part of anything that is being studied. I don't think we want to be off on random committees and not know what's going on in the other committees. They can be integrated quite easily. Poverty and disability issues can definitely be part of the poverty study.

Are we just going to go into the poverty study? Are we going to go into this report and find a strategy for poverty? I thought that was what Mr. Martin's interest was. That's why the employability study has to be first and foremost and be under way.

However, when it comes to separating into subcommittees, I think it really mitigates the issue considerably. I hope that's not even considered. I hope that right now we go back to exactly what we came here to decide, and that in the interest of the meeting being cancelled last week we start with the employability study and get it done. We have a little bit of room now for Bill C-265, definitely. We now know that the minister has to appear. Everybody is anxious for that. And then right away we'll get into poverty in January.

Can this somehow be done in the form of a motion to make sure it's done and that there's no more diverting to more studies?

• (1550)

The Chair: There are just a couple of things. My suggestion is that we invite the minister for this Wednesday coming up, depending on his schedule. If he can't come then, he'll have to come maybe on the following Monday. We'll start with the employability study and then move forward.

I'm just reminded by the researchers that there was a draft plan created for a study on anti-poverty strategies that we did not distribute. It was done for the subcommittee. I'm going to ask him to release that to all the members so they can have a chance to look at it. We can talk about that. Once again, as we get closer to our last couple of meetings, we'll need to meet as a subcommittee to talk about that, and we'll have to set some time aside.

Once again, my suggestion is that we invite the minister to come this Wednesday or at his earliest convenience to talk about the estimates. So it's either Wednesday or Monday. Barring that, we should be looking at the employability study. It will either be on Wednesday or on Monday, but it will take care of what we are able to do.

We can look at putting off Bill C-265 until the new year, because it doesn't have to be reported back until March 5. If we have that ability, that will make it easy. As we get closer to the end of our session here, we need to have some time. We could maybe take a half hour or so to discuss what some of those things will look like.

Go ahead, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: That sounds like it's coming together.

I'd like to move a motion that we strike a subcommittee to address persons with disabilities and some of their issues. With all due respect to Ms. Yelich, it's not just about poverty. There are many, many issues that confront the disabled community out there as they try to participate in society, whether working or in their everyday life and community. They'd like the federal government to begin to look at a strategy.

The Americans have the Americans With Disabilities Act, which has been very helpful to disabled people across that country. It's been in place for a number of years. Is that something we want to look at here in Canada, something that covers the whole gamut of life where disabled people are concerned? It puts in place regulations for public buildings, and even private businesses, so people with disabilities can have access.

They're asking us—certainly, they've asked me—to suggest and to move at this committee that a subcommittee be struck. It's not just about poverty. Certainly, the face of poverty in this country is a disabled face in many interesting and troubling respects, but it's not the only thing they're facing. The subcommittee could work parallel to this committee, get some really good work done, and come back with recommendations that we could take forward to government to make changes that would make life better for the disabled.

So I'd like to move a motion to that effect. But while I have the floor, if you don't mind, Mr. Chair, I would suggest this. I brought forward a plan a few months ago on the poverty study, and Ms. Yelich is right, and I agree with Ms. Dhalla, that this study needs to be very focused. We don't want another long drawn-out “does poverty exist, what does it look like, how do you measure it” and all of the things we often get ourselves into when we start to look at that subject. I think we should be looking at some answers, some strategy, a national anti-poverty strategy, for example, comprehensive in nature, that we could all buy into and recommend to Parliament, so the government could then hopefully take ownership of it and run with it.

In that proposal that I brought forward, and the researcher may have that, we did suggest even a bit of a timeline at the beginning, to look at, for example, and not spend a lot of time on in a concerted way, the whole question of in fact how we measure poverty. Maybe we could agree early on what that might be. I know there's work now beginning at the provincial level in at least three provinces dealing with that. One is in Ontario, and I met with some officials this morning. There's an official there, a Mr. Mendelson, I believe, who's been charged with looking at the issue of the different methods of measuring poverty in this country. I think at some point those of us who have responsibility and are charged with leadership need to decide on one and then move on a strategy to see if we can't get people at least above that line.

I'd suggest that we charge the researcher with doing some initial research and analysis. There's been a lot of work that's been done by the National Council of Welfare and by a number of institutes, the Fraser Institute, for example. There were studies done by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. If Kevin could pull some of that information together, that would be a good start for us in terms of what it is we need to be looking at as we move forward with that study.

So I'll just leave it at that.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

One thing I'll ask is, if it's possible, whether you could get something back to the clerk that we could redistribute again. I know you had something, and I believe it was in both official languages. That would be great as well.

The other thing is I think we'll wait to give the clerk direction as to what exactly we want, and you guys could have a chance to look at this as well, just to formulate your thoughts. There's been lots of stuff done, certainly among other committees, and we're going to need to collect some of that information anyway so we're not duplicating or going over some of the same things. It would be great to actually figure out what's out there, and we'll talk about that.

I have Ms. Dhalla, Mr. Lake, and then Mr. Lessard.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Just very quickly, could we ask the clerk, as we're talking about the issue of poverty, to not only distribute the document that we spoke about beforehand, but could we also get some other research done of different studies, perhaps, related to poverty that have been conducted by other committees? That way, as our chair said, we won't have overlap; or if there are significant gaps that have been outlined or highlighted in previous studies, we could actually take a look at some of those.

Then, perhaps at one of our committee meetings, not one that the minister is going to be at but a subsequent meeting, we could allocate 15 or 20 minutes and get everyone's opinions and suggestions as to what areas of poverty they would like to have studied.

The Chair: Some of that is referenced in there, so after everyone has had a chance to look at this plan, we as a group can make some suggestions.

Thank you, Ms. Dhalla.

Mr. Lake, Mr. Lessard, and then Ms. Yelich.

Mr. Mike Lake: We're already seeing in this meeting, as we talk through some things, that we're definitely going to have some challenges in terms of maintaining our focus. As we go forward up to Christmas time, it seems to me that all we're really going to have time for is having the minister come before us and finishing this employability study.

In terms of the poverty study, it's interesting. We all have agreement that we want to do a poverty study, and we all take the issue very, very seriously. It's probably pretty clear that we're going to have some disagreements in terms of how we might think best to tackle this important issue.

To say that we're not going to have anything to do with defining what the issue is or talking about measurements of poverty or anything like that is the wrong way to go about it. I think you need to be somewhat systematic in this. We need to define the problem before we decide how we're going to solve it.

In terms of the motion we're talking about here, for a subcommittee, first, on the status of persons with disabilities, I'm a little bit unclear as I read the motion I have in front of me. In terms of the way the motion is worded, it's almost as if this subcommittee already exists, and then it doesn't actually assign any purpose to this subcommittee.

Again, in the interest of staying focused, I'm not sure that it makes sense to cut off part of us within the group to send off on a parallel study when we're already probably one of the busiest committees on the Hill, and of course many of us have more than one committee.

For example, I wouldn't want to not be a part of this disability subcommittee, given my own personal family circumstances, but I can't see how I could possibly do all the things that I am tasked with doing and contribute to finishing the employability study, and then finishing working properly on a poverty study, while at the same time having another role on a subcommittee with an issue as important as this one.

Again, I would say that there are a lot of wonderful, wonderful things we can do as a committee, especially in this committee, but we're going to have to pick some priorities and focus on those priorities.

As was mentioned by a couple of people, when we're dealing with people with disabilities, a large number of the issues that impact people and families dealing with disabilities for sure came into play during the employability study and will be reflected in that report, and absolutely will also be reflected in terms of the poverty study. If we're going to do a disability report of some sort, I think that would be an important study to do at some point, but it would be better done as a full committee, following the two studies we have on our plate right now.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lake.

I have now Mr. Lessard, Ms. Yelich, and Mr. Chong.

I'm just going to mention as well, for the sake of the whole committee, that there are three publications in translation right now that deal with the issue of poverty, and we will have those for the committee. One involves some strategies in Newfoundland and Quebec; I believe the other one is the U.K. and Ireland; and one is a federal study. So three very helpful strategies will be available. They are in translation, and our colleague Chantal has been working on those.

That's just to let you know what has been going on behind the scenes to move forward on this.

I have Mr. Lessard, Ms. Yelich, and then Mr. Chong.

[*Translation*]

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

We are fairly in agreement over the four issues that have been raised. In terms of time, two major issues are going to be keeping us busy: employability and poverty. Experience over the past three years has shown us that when we bite off more than we can chew, we do not accomplish much. Employability is an example. If we go over our list, there are also other issues that we have not really completed. I would limit myself to those four issues.

Mr. Lake touched on the topic of persons with disabilities. These are people with whom I have close ties. These are people who often suffer from isolation and poverty. We should therefore focus our work more on the issue of poverty.

When we dealt with the issue of employability, I found that, at first, we had targeted what we wanted to do quite well, but as we progressed, we went off in every direction, and now we are having trouble getting our act together to do something substantial that could be of use to the House.

Let me remind you that meeting the Minister is fine; we can prepare for this, but we are going to have to plan a meeting to do so. We are going to need one more meeting for Bill C-265. So that is not what is going to take up the most time; it is the other two issues. As for employability, I do not think that we can deal with that subject in a single meeting. It is going to take many meetings, because there is still a lot of work to do on this subject.

We all share the same concerns about poverty. I am repeating myself here, but I think that we have to be properly prepared in order not to repeat what has already been done by others. For instance, what is poverty? People who are better qualified than we are have already defined it for us. We can measure poverty. Poverty can be observed. People in politics at our level have two concerns. The first is to be able to arm ourselves with everything that has been done on the subject and identify what can be of use to us. That gives us insight. Then we will have a true picture of poverty. Afterwards, we will have to obtain expert advice on specific clienteles, for example, Aboriginal people, persons with disabilities, elderly persons, particularly older women who are alone.

I therefore think that we will have to perform those duties first. Once we have gotten to work on finding ways to combat poverty, which is part of our mandate, we will be better equipped to do so.

I would like to point out immediately that our concern in our work will be to develop recommendations for the House. It is not by chance that poverty exists. There are aggravating factors for poverty and, especially, policy constraints that prevent us from getting people out of poverty. We have to identify them. I think that we can identify them together. We will quickly find ways. We just need to ask ourselves if our mutual political parties have the real political will to take measures to combat poverty. That is where the question lies.

I was happy to hear the Liberal Party leader say, last week, that he would have a plan to combat poverty. However, it is not enough to announce it. There has to be some substance to it. If we can contribute to the Liberal Party's plan, the Conservative Party's plan or our own, so much the better. We will vote that way at the same time.

The big issue, I think, once we will have covered employability, is poverty. As Mr. Lake intimated, we should try to find a slot for persons with disabilities, unless I have misunderstood our colleague Tony, who has been concerned with this for a long time. I think that we can link up with his concern through the poverty issue. For the moment, Mr. Chairman, I believe that we should limit ourselves to these four issues.

•(1605)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

What I'm hearing you say is that the disability issue is important. Maybe it's something we should look at after we finish with the poverty issue.

Mr. Yves Lessard: That's right.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have two more names on the list. People can continue to speak, but we'll flesh out the agenda and deal with Mr. Martin's motion on disability.

Next I have Ms. Yelich, and then Mr. Chong.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: When it comes to the disability issues, the minister has said he would like to introduce legislation, and that would be the perfect time to start. Mr. Martin spoke about accessibility and inclusion. This is what the act will be when the legislation gets introduced.

I too met with those people last week who were on the Hill. They were marching in solidarity to show that they too are working together to try to overcome some of the obstacles that exist for them. Many of them are quite happy with the direction we're taking, and they want to have input into legislation. I think we should be waiting to see what the legislation looks like, and then the disabled group will be a big part of it, so I think there is no need to have this.

I was very heartened to hear Mr. Lessard say what he did, because he's right: let's just get to work on the four priorities.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The last speaker I have is Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to indicate that I think we should focus on four things sequentially: getting the minister to appear in front of the committee will take one meeting; then, sometime between now and February, addressing this private member's bill—obviously we have to do that, and it will take at least one meeting; and then I think we should finish the employability study before we begin the poverty study. Otherwise, we have two studies out there hanging, and I don't think that's going to be good for the committee. I think we really should try to get this employability study out of the way and then start the poverty study.

As far as going on to any further topics, such as disability, is concerned, I don't think we should do that. It's just going to be too distracting for the committee. We're having trouble just completing this employability study. I think we should get it out of the way and then focus on poverty and not get sidetracked by anything else.

I guarantee you that other issues will pop up that we don't know about yet. There may be appointments that the opposition will want to review in committee, appointments that the Minister of Human Resources has made. There may be other issues that pop up between now and the coming months. We should just stick to poverty after we finish employability, and I don't think we should go on to anything else.

•(1610)

The Chair: What we're going to instruct the clerk to do is invite the minister for this Wednesday—and if he can't make it, of course, then at his earliest convenience, which would be the following Monday—as we have to report estimates back by the end of next week.

Working around the minister's schedule, we'll get back to finishing and completing the recommendations as well as the report on employability.

Does everyone have a copy of the report, or does anyone need a copy?

Once again, I'm going to ask people to come with what they'd like to deal with, so that we can move through it fairly quickly. If you have a page or paragraph on what we need to deal with, that will help us in going through it. So you'll have a little homework for the next week or so to do that.

The last thing is that we will get the draft work plans out. Once these other publications are translated, we'll make sure we get those out as well. Then we can have another fulsome discussion. We can have a half hour at the end of one of our subcommittee meetings, or whatever is required, to give direction to the clerks to get us prepared for when we start in the new year, in the last part of January and the first part of February.

We will not need to deal with the private member's bill, Bill C-265, until we get back. We'll leave that off our docket right now.

It would be great if we could get the employability study finished by the end of this sitting, before we leave; however, we'll see how quickly we move through it as we start and take it up.

Is that okay for a work plan as we move forward?

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: Yes, I have no difficulty with that.

I just want to speak very briefly again to the motion, which I put on the floor, to strike a subcommittee to emphasize that this comes to us from the disabled community out there that want us to look at some of the issues they are facing, and have been facing for a long time, and don't seem to be getting anywhere with. They don't want to wait for another six months or a year, or for another government, or whatever happens here.

We have had subcommittees in the past. In the 38th Parliament we had a number of subcommittees; we had one on EI that met and hammered out a proposal that came back to the full committee for its blessing and then moved forward. Actually, we had two subcommittees on issues of disability. One was around access to this place, and a report came out that was brought forward to Parliament that was then addressed. Then there was a subcommittee on disabilities that dealt with some other issues. It worked well, and it got some really important work done parallel to this committee that was a priority.

All I'm saying is that it's not me bringing this forward. I'm speaking on behalf of the disabled community that would like us to be looking at some of the issues. They've put out a fairly well-developed and good national action plan for themselves, and they'd just like to see some parts of it be looked at and perhaps brought forward for action by the government.

So I don't know about the rest of you, but in our caucus we have 30 members, and each of us has a responsibility in an area to be critic. We have one member, actually Judy Wasylycia-Leis, who is the critic for disability issues, who would actually sit on that subcommittee on our behalf. So it doesn't mean that all of us have to be on that subcommittee. We can delegate that to somebody else, somebody who has a particular interest in it. That then makes it easier for all of us.

I've already put the motion, so those are my further comments.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin. My sense is that I think a lot of the people would like to actually be involved with that, but we do have the motion. I'll bring it forward in a second once I've had a chance to complete the list.

Now I have Mr. Chong, Mr. Lessard, and Mr. Savage.

Mr. Chong.

•(1615)

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't think we should support this motion. I do acknowledge that persons with disabilities need government support and help, and those issues need to be discussed. But the priority for the committee should be the poverty study, and I think if we get sidetracked by other issues, then we'll get nothing accomplished. I've seen this happen on other committees where the committee goes in two different directions at once and at the end of the day nothing gets done. I don't think that's to the benefit of anybody.

So I suggest we focus on the poverty study after we finish the employability study. What I could also suggest, Mr. Chair, is that part of the poverty study could incorporate concerns of persons with disabilities, because I think one of the big problems I've seen for persons with disabilities in Canada relates to the fact that, in my view, there aren't enough income supports for those people with disabilities, such as mental disabilities. If you look at the level of support that is provided to persons with severe mental disabilities, it's frankly quite shocking how little support they do get from government. I think that could be incorporated into a study on poverty. So I suggest that we do that instead. Incorporate into our study on poverty issues persons with disabilities, especially persons with mental disabilities, who often cannot get gainful employment

and who often actually have significant costs associated with their care. Not only do they not have gainful employment or a way to make money to support themselves, but they also often have huge costs associated with their daily care and their daily support.

I suggest we incorporate that into the poverty study, as opposed to embarking on a completely separate study that I think will just get us sidetracked and will ultimately mean that we won't likely get either study done, either on poverty or on persons with disabilities. So I suggest we do that.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chong.

I've got Mr. Lessard and then I've got Mr. Savage. If I have no more discussion after that, I will call the vote on the motion Mr. Martin has brought forward.

Go ahead, Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chairman, I think that we agree that we will have to study the situation of persons with disabilities, except that we have already presumed how we will be working on the poverty issue. Straight away, we said we would be doing a poverty study, and would deal with persons with disabilities as a separate issue. As for me, I am very concerned about the situation of Aboriginal persons. I, too, could now propose that we create a subcommittee to deal with Aboriginal persons, but this would again be presuming how we will be organizing our work on poverty.

I would like to ask our colleague Tony to refrain from presenting his motion, because it tends to convey the message that we do not want to take an interest in the fate of persons with disabilities, which is not the case. We just have to determine when we are going to deal with this topic. I think that he could present his motion again after the holidays if he has not found some room to deal with poverty in the work plan we will have established. We could all easily deal with poverty here or say that there are segments of the population that are more affected than others. This could be persons with disabilities, Aboriginal people and elderly people, particularly women. We could decide to set up two or three subcommittees. I do not know how we will be working on this, but I would ask our colleague not to present his motion right away and to wait and see how we are going to deal with the poverty issue. If we cannot find the room we need for his concern, which we all share, we could come back to his idea of a subcommittee.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

The last person I have on the list is Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Nobody wants to pit people who are disadvantaged against each other in terms of priority for Canada's Parliament.

What I would say to Mr. Martin's motion is that in light of the fact that it would call for one member from each party, our critic for persons with disabilities is not on the HUMA committee. Tony's case is similar. I would be prepared to discuss with our critic if she might be interested in being the member on this committee.

It certainly is an issue that, as has been indicated by everybody, is very important. Perhaps it can be part of the poverty agenda, but we don't know how much time we have in this Parliament and we don't know that we will get to this study if we don't do it now.

My view is this. I would ask if we could vote on this at the beginning of the next meeting so that I could ask my critic if she would be interested in being the representative on this subcommittee.

•(1620)

The Chair: Hold on a second. We've got Mr. Lake and we've got Mr. Martin. If Mr. Martin wants to withdraw it, he can, but once again, let's go there. We also have Ms. Yelich.

Mr. Mike Lake: I see, though, that this is going exactly in the direction that I think we need to avoid on this committee; that is, now we're talking about it in another meeting.

A big part of the reason I wanted to be on this committee in the first place was that this is an area of personal interest for me. I can tell you that I could not possibly do my job properly.... I'm on the public accounts committee and I'm on this committee already. I could not take that on and do my job properly—the job I'm elected to do, the same job you're all elected to do.

It's clear that this is really a very important issue for all of us on this committee. It's very clear just from the discussion here. That being the case, I'm sure disability issues will have their rightful prominence in the employabilities report that we're about to do. It was a big part of what we heard from the witnesses. These are important issues, and it's a big part of the issues that many of the groups are dealing with. It's not all of the things they want to deal with, but it's a big part of the agenda for these groups that represent people with disabilities, as poverty will be.

I want to stress again that I think it's a tremendously important issue, as are the other two studies we're undertaking. Again, I think we just need to make sure we're doing things properly in this committee if we're actually going to get anything done.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lake.

I have Mr. Martin and Ms. Yelich on my list.

Mr. Tony Martin: I just want people to know that I don't want to make this a situation of people being embarrassed because they didn't support a subcommittee to look at disabilities. I put it forward because the disability community wanted a subcommittee set. We've done this before, and it doesn't mean that this committee gets itself bogged down in two or three different studies at one time. There's a parallel committee, a group of people. The Liberals obviously have a disability critic. We have a disability critic. I'm not sure about how the Conservative caucus is organized around that, but that they would meet specifically on issues of disability.... It's obvious today

that we're not on the same page, so I would withdraw the motion, with the proviso that we speak further about it and see if we can find a way to get this thing done and get it done as soon as possible.

The Chair: Do we have unanimous consent to withdraw the motion at this point in time?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

Ms. Yelich, would you like to comment? No. You're okay.

I'll say once again that I'm hearing around the table that it's an important issue for everybody, and the concern is that we all have a chance to tackle it. I would think we'll hold it for another day.

Thank you for withdrawing the motion.

If there's no other business, I'm going to adjourn the meeting for now.

Is there any other business?

Yes, Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: Are we going to have a subcommittee meeting of the steering committee at any point to follow this up?

The Chair: We will, as we get closer to determining what we need to talk about for poverty.

Mr. Michael Savage: So for this Wednesday, if it's not the minister, it's the employability report?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Michael Savage: And people will make sure that all members have copies of the employability report?

The Chair: Most definitely. The clerk will redistribute them, and I would once again ask that people come with their concerns so we can go through it fairly quickly.

Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake: We had one meeting on the employability committee, right? Is it possible—and this is still the rookie in me coming out, I guess—to get a copy of the transcript from that meeting? I was at another committee meeting at that time. It would be just for my own private use, so I could review.

•(1625)

The Chair: I believe the meeting was in camera, and you'd have to go to the clerk's office to see it. You can do that, if you'd like to do that.

Thank you very much, everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.

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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