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**Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills
and Social Development and the Status of
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Tuesday, March 8, 2011

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Chair

Ms. Candice Hoepfner

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

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•(1105)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC)): I'd like to call to order meeting number 48 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Pursuant to the orders of the day, we will continue to look at Bill C-304, An Act to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for Canadians. The last time that we met on this particular bill, we were going through the bill clause by clause, giving it clause-by-clause consideration. We were looking at an amendment. The amendment was a Bloc amendment, and we were actually in the middle of discussions surrounding the amendment.

Now I'm just going to check with Mr. Komarnicki. When we adjourned the last meeting, you were still speaking. Do you wish to continue to speak, or had you completed your thoughts?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): I don't remember and I don't know and I'm not sure, but I can certainly speak.

I think I'd prefer to pass to the next speaker, and if I have something further to say, I'll ask my name be put on the list.

The Chair: The last two speakers actually right now were Mr. Vellacott and then Mr. Casson.

I don't see Mr. Vellacott here....

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: There's no one else here, so I suppose I should finish what I was saying. I will start where I left off.

I'll begin at the beginning.

I obviously indicated my concerns with the amendment.

An attempt was made by this committee to previously amend the bill in a way that would allow Mr. Lessard and the Bloc party to have the ability for Quebec to opt out but still receive the benefits and the funding. That wasn't acceptable; it wasn't going to work. The Speaker said so, and this amendment is an attempt to get around that somehow. I think it will be challenged by the Speaker. If it wasn't a means to get around that, then Mr. Lessard would not be happy with the bill.

It says that "Quebec may, as a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights...". My understanding is that it's factually and legally incorrect, in that parties to international

conventions are either provinces or territories, and they aren't referred to as parties. That's one of the facts relating to the amendment that I take issue with.

The other is that in this case it allows Quebec to "participate in the benefits of the act with respect to its own choices, its own programs, and its own approach related to housing on its territory", which again hardly makes it a national housing strategy.

If you're going to have a national housing strategy, then everybody has to abide by it. I think in principle we don't need one because we already have federal, provincial, territorial first ministers' meetings. They're already looking at precisely the things that we're talking about here.

The Speaker says that the bill itself does not involve any commitment of money, so what we're talking about is a strategy that is simply some overarching principles that are presently being adhered to. I think that if we make a special provision for Quebec, it would be strange in a national housing policy that we would have specific reference to one province and give any special benefits or privileges or special conditions that we're not prepared to give to all provinces.

If the drafters of this bill were going to be fair and logical to all of Canada nationally, they would include all provinces and all territories. Why you might specifically include only Quebec would have to be out of appeasement to the Bloc and Mr. Lessard, who wants to preserve the province's right to do as it pleases and do its own thing and get funding at the same time—if there is funding.

From a position of principle, we would oppose this particular amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Casson, did you want to add anything?

Hon. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Chair, I think that Ed pretty well summed up the issues that I had with this as well. There is also the fact that if you get an unpopular ruling according to what you particularly want to have, and then you keep bringing it back and bringing it back, that is not the way this committee, or any committee, should operate.

The chair and the Speaker ruled. I could get into the provincial jurisdiction, but I think Ed's handled that pretty well. That's my only comment.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We are prepared to vote on this particular amendment.

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): I would like a recorded division, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: It will be a recorded vote. Go ahead.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4)

(Clause 4 agreed to)

The Chair: Shall the bill as amended carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the chair report the bill as amended to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Can we put a dissenting opinion there, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Would you like to...? No, I'm sorry.

Shall the committee order a reprint of the bill as amended for the use of the House at report stage?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right, we will order that reprint.

We are about 45 minutes ahead of schedule. What I could do is suspend for a nice five- or ten-minute break to get lunch. I should say two minutes, because usually that will extend to five minutes.

I will suspend for a couple of moments. We can grab lunch and then, if everyone is in agreement that we would proceed ahead of our planned schedule, we can go ahead and do that and not wait until noon.

We will suspend for a couple of minutes.

• _____ (Pause) _____

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• (1120)

The Chair: We're ready to begin the second part of our meeting.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Monday, December 6, 2010, we are now looking at Bill C-481, An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Canada Labour Code (mandatory retirement age).

We are proceeding to clause-by-clause consideration.

(On clause 1)

The Chair: I will at this time call the first clause.

Go ahead, Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I have a point I want to raise with the committee. I'm going to ask essentially that this bill, Bill C-481,

which deals with mandatory retirement, not proceed to clause-by-clause consideration today. I'm going to ask the committee to consider tabling it, because a number of witnesses, particularly FETCO, the Chamber of Commerce, and the pilots association, have raised what they have said are matters of considerable concern to them.

FETCO, particularly, when talking about pensions and benefits, said that they would like to have seen an amendment that would allow age differentiation with respect to what those who might continue working past a certain age would have to face with respect to how much they might pay to get into the pension, whether they would get moneys back at a different level, and whether they would be entitled to some of the benefit plans, whether it's medical, drugs, or whatever. They felt that this was an important exemption. They also mentioned that they would have liked to have seen an exemption that provided for more rigorous testing and so on as the age increases.

The pilots association has said that in the collective bargaining agreements that have been entered into, they've made some agreements between the pilots—the young and the old pilots—whereby all of them agreed that these would be the rules of the game. Essentially, younger pilots have to stay at the lower pay grade until they reach a certain age, and then they receive higher pay, more benefits, more privileges, and so on. They've indicated quite strongly that if you remove the mandatory retirement age altogether, what would happen is that the younger fellows who have been in the system and in the collective bargaining agreement would not be able to—

The Chair: One moment, Mr. Komarnicki. We have a point of order.

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Although I appreciate what my colleague is trying to do, at the same time, he is bringing forth arguments that we heard from some witnesses and that we discussed fully in other meetings. I would ask you, as chair, to ask Mr. Komarnicki to finish his presentation without going through these arguments.

The Chair: Thank you for that intervention.

Mr. Komarnicki, if you are putting forward a motion to table this, it isn't debatable. I think what we would need to do is just—

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I have to get with it.

The Chair: Yes, please, quickly, because we actually can't debate that motion. We have to vote on it.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I should have given the reason I will be putting forward the motion to table the bill. It's because if we want to, as a committee, do our due diligence and consider potential amendments to this bill, I am told by the people I talk to that since it's a private member's bill, it's likely to be out of the scope of the bill, so we aren't able to do that. Plus, we don't know for sure what kind of amendment it should be to accommodate these people. They raised some legitimate points that we need to consider. Plus, from a government point of view, if we're going to expand the nature of the private member's bill, it has to go through the proper channels and processes to get that consent, whether it be cabinet or otherwise.

I'm saying that at this stage we are not doing our job if we simply proceed with what we have before us without considering what the witnesses have said. They raised some legitimate issues, so I move that we table this bill until those issues can be sorted out or ironed out to the satisfaction of all the parties who are prepared to support the bill, me included.

Now that I've moved a motion, am I allowed to speak to it?

• (1125)

The Chair: No, it's not debatable.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: It's not debatable?

The Chair: No. You've moved the motion to table this particular bill, so the clause-by-clause....

No, it's not debatable.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: So the motion is not debatable.

The Chair: This is not a debatable motion.

The motion is that the clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-481 be postponed. It's non-debatable.

(Motion negated)

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Komarnicki, your motion did not carry.

We will proceed with clause-by-clause consideration.

(Clause 1 agreed to)

(On clause 2)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: On a point of order, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

As the originator of this bill, I would like to withdraw the amendment that said that clause 2 of Bill C-481 should be amended by repealing paragraph 15(1)(c) of the act. I will just withdraw it.

The Chair: What you're actually saying is you're not going to move it. You hadn't moved it, and you're not going to. In that case, we don't need to look at any amendment on clause 2.

(Clause 2 agreed to)

(On clause 3)

The Chair: Shall clause 3 carry? All those in favour—I'm sorry; I didn't give enough time.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Are we able to raise it?

The Chair: Yes, you could debate it. We are on clause 3.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Is that the coming-into-force provision?

No, it's the Canada Labour Code.

The Chair: That will be an amendment as we move forward.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I would like to stress something. I know my colleague Tony Martin raised some reservations about the bill, particularly as it applied to the collective bargaining agreements that may have been signed by various members, including the pilots association. To have the bill go forward without the amendments that we initially agreed upon, without regard to what all of the other

witnesses said, and without regard to some of the amendments they proposed is a matter of concern.

I would urge Mr. Martin to consider not supporting this bill and having it go forth to the House without the amendments that were previously agreed to and without any consideration for the amendments proposed by some of the witnesses, such as the Chamber of Commerce, FEDCO, and Air Canada Pilots Association. These are people who have raised some good points.

As a matter of due diligence, it would seem that this bill should not go forward in its present form. Even stripped of the amendments that had previously been agreed to, it seems to be doing a disservice to this committee and to the people who testified before us. Why else would you have people appear before this committee and say—

• (1130)

The Chair: Is there a point of order?

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Yes; I think Mr. Komarnicki has made his point, and I would like him not to debate it. This is not the time and place for it.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but that's not a point of order. He is allowed to speak on this clause.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I haven't quite finished the debate.

As a committee we have a responsibility to exercise due diligence. Due diligence requires that you take into account everything you had before you when you started the meeting, and you take into account the things that have been presented to you. The question is this: was there any reasonableness to the positions they took? Was there any basis to what they said?

By any reasonable standard, you would have to say all of them raised fair points that we hadn't previously taken into consideration. In fairness, they've raised some significant points regarding the impact this would have on previously negotiated agreements, on existing plans and benefits. They've raised some fair points.

Whether we in the end decide to accept those or not remains to be seen. If you can say that you've done your due diligence, that you've looked at the issues they've raised, and that you're satisfied that they have no merit, then I'm okay with that, but in fairness to yourself, your parties, your constituents, or your stakeholders, I don't think you can say that. You can't, and if you can't say it, why are you proceeding with this bill? What's the motivation? It can't be the best interests of those you represent. It cannot be.

I would urge you to think twice about proceeding not just with this clause, but with the entire bill. It should not go forward to the House and get reported without the amendments we agreed to and without consideration of those that were proposed.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Chair: Mr. Lessard, did you say that you wanted to speak on this as well? I wasn't quite sure if that was your intention.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Just to reassure our Conservative colleague, this measure has been in force in Quebec for over two decades, and in fact almost three, that is since 1982.

The questions raised by our colleague Mr. Komarnicki are not an issue, for the following reasons. Whether a person is 68 years old, or 38 years old, if that person cannot do the work, then the employer will let him go. If you can no longer do the job that you were hired to do, the employer will move you out of that job, whether you're 38 or 68 years old.

The same applies in the case of persons deployed to the front. We have heard testimony from members of the military who were concerned about older soldiers being deployed to the front. We have to remember that people seated around the table are not incapable of understanding the issues. No army is going to send a 65-year-old or someone older to the front. Even 50-year-olds are not sent into battle today. The argument is therefore not relevant, Madam Chair.

We also need to look at what happens to a person's pension. Consider a group pension plan to which both the employer and employee contribute. Whether the employee is 40 years old, or 65 years old, the employer will continue to contribute to the plan for as long as the employee is able to work and to make contributions. The employee will not begin to receive benefits until he retires, whether that happens at 67, 68 or 70 years of age.

That is the current rule, Madam Chair. I worked in labour relations for over 40 years, so I can tell you that this is how things work and how pension plan provisions work. In the case of some plans, people who start working at a very young age can retire at the age of 55. In other cases, retirement is possible at 60 or 65 years of age. Each plan has its own rules. We're probably going to be adding a provision to pension plans that will merely extend the number of years already prescribed in the plan.

For these reasons, I think colleagues' concerns are unfounded. Quebec has had some experience with this measure and I can say that none of the concerns raised by our colleagues has proved to be a problem. Quite the contrary, in fact.

Furthermore, Madam Chair, adopting this bill today would be a symbolic move. We believe the bill will improve the lives of women who are forced into retirement at 65, even if they are still capable of working and could end up at home living on a less-than-satisfactory income. The bill represents an anti-poverty measure for older people. I think it would be highly symbolic if we were to adopt the bill today. It is an excellent initiative, one that constitutes a modest anti-poverty measure.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1135)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

Go ahead, Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: No doubt it is symbolic, but it's more than that. No one is suggesting for a moment that mandatory retirement, as we now know it, needs to remain. In fact, we're on record as saying it needs to go, but it needs to go in a reasoned and logical way. There will be steps taken to make it happen, but the witnesses

who appeared before us said that there are some legitimate things we haven't considered in removing mandatory retirement ages, things that provinces have exempted. In the provinces where they've put it forward, they've said they've done it for a reason, because it has consequences. New Brunswick, in particular, has a specific section.

The Air Canada Pilots Association testified before us, and Mr. Martin asked a very particular question that hit the nail on the head. He asked what it is going to do to upward mobility for the younger people in his riding who are pilots or want to be. What it's going to do if we proceed with what we're doing here today is prevent them from going up the chain. If he's going on the record for his constituents and his people that he doesn't care about that—he's heard what they had to say, and it's a legitimate concern, and we haven't taken the time to make an amendment to allow for that to happen—then that's his business, but I think he's not doing what he needs to do.

Second, these young people in his riding who are air pilots have invested their time and efforts on a pre-agreed understood collective bargaining agreement in which perhaps 90% of those who are part of the collective bargaining agreement have said that these are the rules of the game they're going to play by. They're going to be sure that they open up spots so that when you are 60, you will leave, and a young person will progress upward. They have said that they all agree to that and that they also agree that the top echelon of the pilots will be receiving especially good pay and pensions and benefits because they are leaving early.

There are a few who wish to continue after the fact, but they were parties to an agreement that set those rights and they're saying... The president of the union or association has said that they have voted on this agreement. They all agreed when they started the game that this was how they were going to play it; now you, as Parliament, are going to change those rules, and they're saying you shouldn't do it. You should make some exception.

The labour movement—the unions and the associations—should have the right to bargain for what they feel is right, and that should be accepted.

If Mr. Martin says he doesn't care about that, fair enough, but I'm saying he should care about it. We should care about that. We should give them the respect to look at potential amendments that may address their situation or else say that we've looked at it and we don't agree with you. We haven't done that, and for that reason we can't support this section and we can't support this bill at this time.

That's not saying that at the end of the day we would come up with the same product with the same exceptions, but we'd have given them due consideration. We've done our due diligence. We had legal people look at it and say that this is how you might do it. This is how New Brunswick has done it. This is how Saskatchewan and the other provinces have done it. This is the way you can do it. It still enforces and reinforces the principles of taking away the effects of mandatory retirement while allowing the parties to bargain in good faith and putting good consideration—which includes work time, which includes years under lower pay and lower salaries—to do that if they want to.

For those reasons, I would caution us about proceeding in the fashion we're proposing.

The Chair: Go ahead, Madam Folco.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Thank you, Madam Chair.

First I must say that I am surprised to hear Mr. Komarnicki telling us, as a Conservative, that he supports the labour unions. This must be the first time in history that I have heard someone from the opposite side telling me that the Conservatives support labour unions.

Second, he has referred on several occasions to what the witnesses have said, but I notice that the only witnesses he has referred to were witnesses who represented the employers' side of things. They have their full rights to say what they have to say, but I think that when you're going to argue in a debate, you must also bring out what the opposite side has had to say. What the opposite side has said to us, and what I've read also in much of the research I have done in order to present this bill, is that there is a lot of space for young people. We're talking about Air Canada and the airline companies here. There is a lot of space for these people to go up the career ladder. The opposite is not true. There is a lot of space for them.

Third, it is our role as parliamentarians to look at laws and to make sure that these laws correspond to what is happening socially in our country and what is happening with the physical health of people over 60 years of age. I won't go through all this; you've heard all the witnesses and you've read things. There's so much in the newspapers about it. Most people these days are physically fit way past the age of 60.

Collective agreements are important. They're fundamental. However, collective agreements must change with time in order to correspond to what employers and employees want. I remind the members of this committee that the employees have made this clear. I've talked to people representing the airline employees and the people who went against the collective agreement and won their cause, both in court and in the human rights tribunal. They are clear on this.

Fourth, Mr. Komarnicki supports this bill, but not "at this time". I'm quoting: "at this time". This reminds me of what all the employers' witnesses said to us, namely, "We're all for this bill, but just not for us". This is what we heard: "just not for us". Well, the bill is for everyone. It's for an understanding between employers and employees.

Finally, this bill was presented several weeks ago. I had discussions with Mr. Komarnicki on this bill a long time ago, so it isn't as if this bill came as a surprise. When the government side wants to push a bill through quickly, they know how to do it. They're extremely good strategists. We all know this. If a bill is being—how shall I say?—slowed down here, it's not in order to get the cabinet to discuss it further. It's simply to slow it down and have it die. This is why I feel that this bill must go through and must be accepted by our committee.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

● (1140)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Folco.

Monsieur Lessard, you had something else you wished to add?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I mentioned earlier that I worked in the field of labour relations for 40 years. During that time, I represented salaried workers. What Ms. Folco is saying is very true. Next year will mark the 30th anniversary of the adoption of a policy in Quebec to allow people to work beyond the age of 65. As far as I know, this policy has never caused any problems.

I can tell you from experience that there have not been any problems, especially the kind of hypothetical problems mentioned here. Any problems that did arise proved not to be real problems. It was more a matter of making the necessary adjustments to collective agreements.

I have six sisters, one of whom continued to work after the age of 65. She is now 72 years old. She is healthy and still works. Had she been forced to retire at 65, she would have been consigned to a life of poverty. Why? Because like the majority of women, she worked at atypical jobs throughout her life. She would not have been able to retire with a adequate income at 65 years of age. She also wanted to continue working, as it happens.

Today is International Women's Day. This bill affects many older people, men and women alike, but more so women.

In conclusion, I have to say that it all seems rather...I was about to use the word "indecent", but I won't. I am trying to find the proper qualifier. It's astonishing to see our colleague put so much pressure on Mr. Martin to have him table a motion that he hasn't the courage to table himself.

Like us, Mr. Martin will come to a decision after analyzing the testimony, and after drawing on his personal experience and weighing his party's policies. Far be it for us to tell him what to do. I'm not singling him out in particular. I would say the same thing to any other parliamentarian. It's inappropriate, in my view, to target a person directly in an attempt to have him cave on an issue that he has had time to think about. I don't know how Mr. Martin plans to vote, but I have enough respect for him not to try and put any undue pressure on him.

● (1145)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Komarnicki, did you have one more thing you wanted to add?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I have just a final couple of points.

First of all, I think Madame Folco misstated me when she said I only quoted the employers' position. Obviously I quoted the pilot's union and association, which involved employees as well. I want to get that straight. My argument is not simply for the benefit of labour unions and negotiated contracts. What I stand for is due diligence, fair principle, and reason. It's for the benefit of Mr. Martin, who raised the specific points, and his constituency too would raise those points.

You're saying unions can change and contracts can change. Sure, but when two groups bargain in good faith, they don't expect governments to easily interfere with contracts and what they've agreed to and the give and take and the consideration that go into it. Also, if we're going to change the rules of the game midstream after a contract is put in place, they ask us to give them a coming-into-force provision so they can acclimatize.

You withdrew the first amendment; I suspect, just judging by your demeanour, that you're also going to withdraw your second amendment. How you would justify that, based on everything we've heard, I don't know. You're proceeding without the rationale that was indicated by the others to say that you need a coming-into-force provision if you're going that far, because we don't think it's good to just put it into effect. Why? It's because you're interfering with contractual relationships, bona fide considerations in which there's been a give and take, and it takes time to negotiate something different. Even if you do negotiate something different, you've already affected the rights of some people that can never be changed.

I wonder if you're going to proceed with those coming-into-force provisions. Some said two years, some said one year, but that's beside the point. Proceeding with this bill, as it is now, is not good. This particular section can pass, but the bill should not be reported back to the House. It should be defeated at this time and brought back again with due consideration for coming-into-force provisions, with due consideration to what the pilots association, the Chamber of Commerce, FETCO and others like them have said. We should say that we've considered your amendments; we think three of them are bad and two are maybe acceptable, and here's how we're going to proceed as a point of policy: we're going to change the mandatory retirement laws, but we've considered what you've said and we've taken some into consideration and some not.

This bill doesn't allow for that. If I correctly understand the advice I've got, we can't put any of the amendments the witnesses have put forth under the auspices of a private member's bill—

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): I have a point of order.

We had a discussion not very long ago at this committee—led by you, I think—about the fact that we weren't going to repeat the same points at this debate over and over and that we were going to try to move things along. I wonder if that would be applicable here.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I'm done. I made my point.

The Chair: I think we are ready to proceed and consider clause 3.

(Clause 3 agreed to)

The Chair: Clause 4 is a new clause that we're going to be putting into the bill. Would you like to move this new clause?

• (1150)

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Yes.

The Chair: Go ahead, Madame Folco.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I would, therefore, like to move the following amendment:

That Bill C-481 be amended by adding after line 15 on page 1 the following new clause:

“COMING INTO FORCE“

4. This Act comes into force one year after the day on which it receives royal assent.“

Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I'm happy to hear that my argument persuaded Madame Folco.

The Chair: Do you wish to speak to that amendment, Madame Folco?

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Yes; I just want to say that if Mr. Komarnicki is happy to think I did or didn't change my mind because of something he said, let him be a happy camper. I'll be quite happy with that. It's not quite the truth, but that's all right.

The Chair: Is there any other discussion on the amendment proposed by Madame Folco?

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Shall the title carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the bill as amended carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the chair report the bill as amended to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the committee order a reprint of the bill as amended for the use of the House at report stage?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right. That completes our orders of the day.

Go ahead, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): When are we going to look at the framework for the disability study? When is it scheduled?

The Chair: I know it was scheduled that we were going to start the study. I believe it was the meeting following the 22nd, but let me check.

I'm looking at the schedule that we all agreed on, which you probably have as well. Right now we have scheduled meetings that don't have anything to do with disability right up until March 24. The next open meeting would be the on 29th.

I think we had agreed by consensus that we would start the disability study, but if I hear you correctly, you'd actually like to take some time to have a framework meeting.

Mr. Tony Martin: Yes. I thought that at the first meeting, if it's to be the 29th, we could invite some of the disability community leaders to talk to us about what they see today in 2011 as the important issues for us to address in any study that we might do.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: It was certainly my understanding that we were going to do that before we started.

We haven't yet determined a topic for the study. I know that some people in the disability community would like it to be on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and how Canada can do more to honour the ratification of that convention. I think we should bring in CCD, CACL, and some others to get input on what the study should specifically be about.

I also want to remind committee members that I still have a motion on the floor about recreating the subcommittee on persons with disabilities, which may come into the discussion at the same time.

The Chair: If the committee is in agreement, I would propose that we take some time on the 29th to hear from witnesses. We could then take some time to go in camera to discuss as a committee how we'd like to proceed on this study and how many witnesses we'll have. We could have a good and thorough discussion on it.

If everyone is in agreement, we would do that on the 29th. We would have witnesses for the first hour, and we'd then go in camera for the last hour to have a discussion.

Go ahead, Mr. Lessard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I would like to have a better understanding of the process involved, Madam Chair. Unless I'm mistaken, I believe there is a consensus to strike a subcommittee to move the process forward.

I would like to know more about the witnesses. Who could enlighten us on this matter? Should the witnesses appear before the main committee, or right away before the subcommittee? I'm not really clear about any of this, and I'm trying to understand.

• (1155)

[English]

The Chair: I would take direction from the committee. My proposition would be to discuss it as a whole committee, because there seems to be a lot of interest in it, but I would certainly take direction.

If the entire committee doesn't want to be part of the discussion and would like us to form a subcommittee, I would take direction from you, but my recommendation would be that we discuss it as a whole committee during the second hour on the 29th.

Mr. Savage—

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Who will be called as a witness, Madam Chair? You said that witnesses would be called. What exactly would we be asking them questions about? Would it be to determine if a study is warranted? What would such a study focus on? That's what I am unclear about.

[English]

The Chair: I see. Thank you.

I think it would be helpful, Mr. Martin, if you have some suggestions for the committee. We could possibly agree on it and do it right now. We'd then have an idea of who we want to bring in to give us that guidance. I think that's what we're looking for. Would you be able to suggest some witnesses?

Would the committee then be all right with agreeing to the witnesses suggested by Mr. Martin for the 29th?

Mr. Tony Martin: I would like some input. Actually, I think we would be remiss if we didn't hear from others in terms of... I don't know what the lead organizations are in Quebec, for example, but certainly in the rest of Canada there is the Council of Canadians with Disabilities. I'm sure that there are other groups Mike knows about that we should probably bring in as well, so that we have everybody on board as we move forward. We don't want to leave anybody out and we do not want to offend anybody by not including them. I think there are probably two or three key organizations that need to be here to talk to us about what the priorities should be as we move forward.

I wouldn't want to be the only one submitting names. I would want to hear from Mr. Lessard in terms of Quebec, and from Mike as well, because he's had a long history with the disability community, as, I'm sure, has Mr. Komarnicki.

The Chair: Again, this isn't actually a discussion as to all of the witnesses we would be talking about in terms of disability. We're just discussing the few we would bring in on March 29 to get us started.

I want to remind everyone that we are public right now. Normally we have these discussions in camera.

Ms. Block, you wanted to say something.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I had the privilege of serving on an all-party committee that was formed last April, the Parliamentary Committee on Palliative and Compassionate Care. That study involved four pillars and brought in numerous witnesses on suicide, palliative care, disabilities, and elder abuse. I'm thinking that we may want to go back to the members who served on that committee just to get a bit of an understanding of what that committee did and who some of the witnesses who could be brought to this committee are, if in fact we want to continue this way.

Rather than sitting around this table trying to come up with names and throwing them out here today, I would suggest that we come forward with lists and submit them to you.

The Chair: Yes, I think that's probably the best idea. Maybe we even want to dedicate March 29 to having an in camera discussion on this matter so that we can speak freely, because I think that's important.

Mr. Savage, you wanted to add something.

Mr. Michael Savage: I think there are some obvious people who would be part of that. Tony mentioned the CCD. I would mention the CACL, the Canadian Association for Community Living. I would mention Steve Estey, who has appeared before this committee on a number of occasions on disability issues. He was part of the team that both negotiated and then had a part in ratifying the UN convention on the rights of the disabled. There may be others.

Again, on February 8 I put forward a motion that we establish a subcommittee on the status of persons with disabilities. I want to be clear that it would be a subcommittee of this committee. Ms. Block mentioned the committee on palliative care, which was an all-party caucus more than a subcommittee of another committee. This is different from whatever we call the one with a member from each party. What's that called?

The Chair: It is the steering committee.

This has come from the disability community. They felt that when there was a subcommittee for people with disabilities—a subcommittee of this bigger committee—a lot of significant work was done. I still think we need to have that discussion. Let's remember that the idea of doing a study on persons with disabilities is at least one year old, I think, Tony. We just haven't gotten to it. Last spring we brought some of these same people in to give us some ideas. We're just not getting to it, and it needs to be done.

I'm fine with having that discussion on March 29. I certainly would be prepared to give some names of people who could help guide us on what that study should be. I don't think this committee,

without talking to people in the disability community, should identify what it is we're going to study. We should listen to them and ask what they think we need to study to help them progress and be a better part of this wealthy country.

• (1200)

The Chair: All right. I think what we should do is dedicate March 29 to having the discussion in camera about whom we would like to bring forward. After that, we would all submit our witnesses, as Ms. Block suggested, but I think that initially we need to have an organizational meeting, and I think it would be good, in this case, for us all to come together, and not just the steering committee.

What we'll do, then, is spend the first hour on that. That should give us some good parameters. Then we'll see about the second hour of March 29. We may have an adoption report ready. I'll keep the committee abreast of where we're at, and we can make a decision on the second hour of March 29.

I think we're finished. Thank you all very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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