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Chair: Mr. Sean Casey





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

Thursday, May 6, 2021

• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 32 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021. Proceedings will be available via the House of Commons website, and the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

The committee will now proceed to consideration of matters related to committee business. I will remind members that we are in public, not in camera.

I see we have a speakers list already.

I recognize Mr. Vaughan.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan (Spadina—Fort York, Lib.):** Hopefully to move forward collegially, I'm going to move that we defer consideration of Mr. Turnbull's motion, and I will cede the floor to MP Falk to consider her motion to have a study on seniors as currently configured.

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

Ms. Falk please.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC):** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, MP Vaughan, for working cordially with us.

I would like to move a motion that the committee prioritize the seniors study, as amended, and unanimously agreed to on Tuesday, February 2, 2021, as the next study to be undertaken by this committee.

At our last meeting, I did go at length into why I believe this is an important and timely study for us to do. Seniors built this country, and we definitely have the opportunity right now to look at how COVID has affected them, and where we could do a better job after the fact, and even where we could do better the next time something like this happens.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Falk.

The motion is in order, and the debate is on the motion.

Ms. Chabot.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will be in favour of the motion we are debating now. We made ample mention of the work we had done among ourselves, collegially, at the February 2 meeting, suggesting we look at the seniors' study after the employment insurance study.

Ms. Falk's proposal is along those lines. That was her proposal, and I hope we can come to a consensus on that, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[English]

Is there any further discussion on the motion?

Ms. Falk.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Chair, if there is agreement for this to be the next study, I would ask if we could start the study next Thursday, just to give time for witnesses to be contacted and give them enough of a heads-up.

**The Chair:** Yes, that's fine in terms of the logistics.

Perhaps we can deal with the motion and then talk about the logistics. I would think next Thursday is reasonable. It will take time to get the witness list and to get them invited, etc., but that sounds fine.

Are there any further interventions on the motion?

Seeing none, is it the will of the committee to adopt the motion by consensus, or do we require a standing vote?

(Motion agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

**The Chair:** Is there any further committee business?

Sorry, with regard to the timing, Madam Clerk, I think Ms. Falk's proposition is eminently reasonable, and I think we need to discuss a deadline for the submission of witness lists and the like.

We have some hands up, so let's deal with the other committee business and then we'll come back to the specifics of the logistics of the next study.

I recognize Ms. Blaney, please.

• (1535)

**Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's interesting to see you in a different committee today. We spend a lot of time in the veterans affairs committee together.

Thank you, everyone. I'm very pleased to see that a study on seniors is happening. That's such an important issue and we know the challenges that seniors have faced. As I am here on behalf of Madam Gazan, I want to move the notice of motion that she put forward on May 4.

If the chair is willing for this to happen right now, I'm happy to move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on guaranteed livable basic income as a significant and meaningful measure to address the post-pandemic economic recovery, eradicate poverty, strengthen Canada's social safety net, and ensure the respect, dignity and security of all persons in respect of Canada's domestic and international legal obligations; that this study shall take no less than three meetings, and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

I would hope to see that study after the seniors study.

I will leave it to you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Blaney. The motion is in order.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I didn't want to speak to this motion right away. I had a comment on the order of business. I know it is up to you and the clerk to get our order right.

I just want us to remember that we have more time behind us than ahead of us between now and the end of June. Next Thursday, I think we would have time to call for submissions and look at the witness list.

I am concerned about completing the study on urban, rural and northern indigenous housing by the end of the session; we have been conducting it for several weeks and have invited many witnesses for it. I imagine that will be on our agenda. I would also like to complete the review of the employment insurance system, which is the work that we just did.

I understand that all of this can tie in with the motion we just passed on seniors.

Those are my concerns, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

Mr. Vaughan.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** I will move what I hope is a friendly amendment to support the basic income study coming next after this.

In the space between starting and stopping studies, we also have to accommodate Mr. Vis's request for a final report on RHI, as well as bring CMHC's order in council appointment for the new head of

CMHC. We can fit those in as we move to drafting instructions and preparing witnesses, for example, to complete the EI study. We have three other elements of business that we have to fit in between the scheduling of those two studies, and as we have over time, we'll commit to fitting those in, because those are also outstanding motions.

The amendment would be to order the basic income study next after the seniors study and in between, where schedule permits, to fulfill our requirements to bring the head of CMHC in for the order in council appointment and to bring the rapid housing initiative report forward and have officials here to answer questions. Then I agree, we also have to complete the EI study as well as the URN study.

I would propose that motion, and then explain that once we do that, we can actually move a separate motion to go in camera to finish the URN study, which really has only one recommendation to wordsmith, and we can do that this afternoon and hopefully get the URN study finished and then set ourselves up Thursday to finish the EI report. I will also endeavour to see if we can get the Minister of Seniors and officials here to kick-start the seniors report even sooner to free up time later in the schedule for those other challenges we have.

The motion would be an amendment to Ms. Gazan's motion to adopt her study as the second, to commit to making the CMHC request and the RHI report part of the schedule as the committee and officials become available, and then we will deal with the motion later to finalize the URN report.

• (1540)

**The Chair:** There's a lot there.

Ms. Blaney, do you consider that to be friendly? It's only friendly if you say it is.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I consider that to be friendly. It's a bit long, but as long as it has the key wording and we're the next study after the important one of seniors, I am absolutely supportive.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** That's the intent.

**The Chair:** The intent is to fill in the gaps with the matters that have been raised by Mr. Vis, who I now recognize.

Mr. Vis.

**Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Maybe I will move a friendly subamendment to the subamendment: that the clerk of the committee undertake to have Romy Bowers appear at our Tuesday meeting to discuss her new role at CMHC.

**The Chair:** Mr. Vis, I want to let you know that when you presented your notice of motion, which has not yet been moved, we immediately reached out to CMHC, in the anticipation that your motion would be adopted by the committee, to determine the availability of Ms. Bowers. As of right now, we're told that she isn't available before the break week. We had tentatively set a date for May 13 with her, but she's no longer available at that time.

Your suggestion that she come on Tuesday, then, is one that we know now has already been floated and not accepted. Just so you know, in the anticipation that everyone would be agreeable to what you presented in the notice of motion, we put it out there, and we will continue to attempt to fix a date in the expectation that your motion will pass.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Okay. In good faith, then, I will remove my suggested subamendment to the subamendment.

I will note, Mr. Chair, that you have a nice picture from British Columbia there, from near Revelstoke, B.C.

**The Chair:** Yes, indeed. It was painted by a downtown Charlot-town painter.

[Translation]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor.

[English]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Wow, life is good today.

[Translation]

We all understand that the seniors' study, the topic of the motion we just passed, becomes the next study. The motion we will be debating later will be on minimum income and may be the second study. My main concern is that I don't want these two studies to take precedence over the studies we have already done, the rural, urban and northern indigenous housing study and the review of the employment insurance system. As part of our work, we are adopting a motion on another study, but first we need to have completed the reports on the two studies we have done. In other words, just to be clear, the order of the studies is not: seniors, minimum income, indigenous housing and employment insurance. We must also respect the work we have done and set a goal of doing everything we can by the end of June to have it completed. I am concerned that Ms. Falk's study spans six meetings.

After all that, we could discuss the next study topic of minimum income.

• (1545)

**The Chair:** Ms. Chabot, I firmly believe that we are on the same page. I hope that we will complete the study on indigenous housing today and as soon as the draft report on employment insurance is ready, it will be presented to the committee for review. We are exactly on the same page.

[English]

Are there any further interventions on the motion?

[Translation]

Ms. Chabot, did you have something to add?

[English]

Seeing none, are we ready for the question?

You have heard Ms. Blaney's motion and the friendly amendment by Mr. Vaughan. Are we in agreement to pass this by consensus?

Madam Chabot.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** I'm sorry; the hand goes up, down, and up again; it makes us do virtual exercise.

I want to be completely transparent, Mr. Chair. I will not object to the question of the minimum income study. I think we know that on the NDP side it is talked about regularly. But this is an issue that goes beyond the federal level. It's a substantive issue, and I'm not sure where this minimum income study is going to take us.

I will not oppose it, but quite honestly I am puzzled by the conclusions that could be drawn from such a study that would seek to implement a basic or guaranteed minimum income. We know full well that this involves all the provinces and their social programs.

We can do a theoretical study, but, quite honestly, I doubt the conclusions of such a study.

**The Chair:** Do you want a recorded vote?

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Yes, please.

[English]

**The Chair:** On the motion, we have exhausted the speakers list. We're ready to proceed to the vote.

Madam Clerk, could you do a standing vote?

The amendment was friendly, so we can proceed with the motion as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 6; nays 0)

**The Chair:** Are there any further motions or any further business?

We need to talk about the logistics of the seniors study.

I recognize Mr. Vis.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Mr. Chair, I think I should move my motion as we previously discussed.

I would like to move, in respect to the motion I tabled on Friday, April 9, 2021:

That pursuant to the Order of Reference of March 26, 2021 and Standing Orders 110 and 111, the Committee call Romy Bowers, appointee for President of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, to appear for no less than one meeting in advance of May 31, 2021.

• (1550)

**The Chair:** Mr. Vis, the motion is in order.

Is there any discussion?

Mr. Vaughan.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** I just want to check whether she's available on June 2, or whatever the date of the next scheduled meeting is. If that's a problem, I want to make sure we're in agreement that it be at the earliest convenience, hopefully by May 31, but if she can't make it for whatever reason— Ms. Gazan is missing for personal reasons; life happens—that we don't lose the opportunity to talk in June.

I just want to check the intent of the motion.

We'll endeavour, but I don't schedule her and she's the head of a crown corporation. We have to try, right?

I agree. I'm not saying no. I just want to make sure that if we can't get May 31, but June 2 is all right, we don't preclude that. That's all.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** I would be open to a friendly subamendment, accordingly.

Let me just pull the motion up again. Maybe along the lines of keeping the May 31 deadline, we state that if Romy Bowers is unable to attend by May 31, she appear before the committee before the end of the spring session.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Perfect. That's good.

**The Chair:** Is there any further discussion?

Seeing none, are we ready for the question? Do we have consensus to adopt the motion?

I see consensus.

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

**The Chair:** Is there any further business before we move into the logistics of the seniors study?

Ms. Dancho, please.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Chair, I have just two quick things.

I want to thank committee members for working so well together today. I really appreciate that from the Conservative side. It was a pleasure to work. It was so wonderful, for 10 minutes, to get so much done. I hope we can continue that in the future.

I want to put a bee in everyone's bonnet for whether we do have time at the end to consider another study. Again, I know there are lots of different studies that folks want to have considered.

I did want to mention again something that was moved on February 2. It was MP Jamie Schmale's motion about supporting families after the loss of a child. A report with seven recommendations to support parents while they're grieving the loss of their infant children came forward about two years ago. Jamie Schmale's motion was looking to have an update from the minister, government officials and perhaps a few witnesses to update where we're at.

I just want to put that out there. We'd appreciate the consideration, if there is time at the end once we're done the studies we've adopted today.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Vaughan.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** I have no problem accepting it, as long as it doesn't get in the way of RHI, which is already an established meeting, and the CMHC head. I have no problem listing it as an approved study already, to be scheduled later after we get through the two studies and three identified reports, as well as the drafting instructions and wordsmithing, which, in this committee, has taken a bit of time.

I have no problem saying yes in principle. Scheduling it may have to wait until we get through at least one or two studies.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** That sounds good.

Thank you Mr. Vaughan and Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** With respect to our next study on seniors, we should set a date for the submission of prioritized witness lists. We should set a deadline for briefs.

I'm going to look first to the clerk in terms of a reasonable lead time for witness lists. As Ms. Falk has suggested, if we are to see our first panel of witnesses one week from today, what would be a reasonable time to have those lists to you, so that could happen with headsets and the like?

I'll turn to Madam Clerk, and then I'm going to go to Mr. Vis.

• (1555)

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Danielle Widmer):** I would just recommend that as names are available, the members submit them to me as soon as possible. Ideally, if I can get some tomorrow, that would help in the process, if we are to invite witnesses for Thursday.

I would propose a deadline of Monday, just to give the time to look at it. If I do receive names after that, I will consider it. I would suggest the end of day Monday for a deadline for witnesses. It does take a few days to get headsets to the witnesses.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Vis and then Mr. Vaughan.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Mr. Chair, I would just like to make a friendly suggestion to the clerk and analysts that a press release be issued in reference to our adopted motion and commencement of the seniors study. I think there's a lot of interest around this across Canada. It would be a timely way to get more briefs to help populate the number of Canadians we're hearing from to make sure that we reach some comprehensive and thorough recommendations upon its completion.

**The Chair:** Normally there would be something posted on the website, but I hear you saying that you'd like to see something more than that. Can we have a discussion on that?

We have a proposal by Mr. Vis:

That a press release announcing the commencement of the seniors study be issued.

Would anyone like to discuss that? I'm going to take that as a motion for now.

Go ahead, Mr. Vaughan.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** It is a great idea on canvassing for briefs, because six meetings limit the number of witnesses we can have, and this is a broad conversation across many different jurisdictions, geographies and experiences—you name it. Every measure of diversity exists in our seniors community. Canvassing for briefs would give us the opportunity to get as much information as possible to draw the findings of the report and the recommendations, so I have no problem with that. I think we should. It's a wise idea to do that.

**The Chair:** Okay, Mr. Vis, did you have something else to say? You're good.

Is there any further discussion on the proposal to issue a press release announcing the commencement of this study and an invitation for the submission of briefs?

Seeing none, do we have consensus to proceed in that fashion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** I believe we do. Okay.

Madam Clerk, if you could draft a press release in accordance with Mr. Vis's direction, that would be great.

Do we have consensus to set as a deadline for the submission of prioritized witness lists five o'clock eastern time on Monday, May 10?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** We have consensus on that, with the understanding, of course, that anything submitted after the fact could be added, but we would ask you to make every effort to get prioritized lists in so that at least the first meeting can happen on time.

Thank you.

The clerk, in consultation with the chair, will schedule witnesses who, to the greatest extent possible, reflect the prioritized list of witnesses submitted by members of the committee in the proportions of the recognized parties of the House.

That is standard operating procedure, but for the sake of good form, I'd like to put this forward and ask that somebody own it in case there is any discussion on it, so I would invite a motion:

That the clerk, in consultation with the chair, schedule witnesses that, to the greatest extent possible, reflect the prioritized list of witnesses submitted by members of the committee and the proportions of recognized parties in the House.

Would somebody care to move that motion, please?

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** I'll move that motion.

I'd also like to ask members of the committee whether they would like the minister to appear at the beginning or the end. If we can schedule the minister and can get the minister, staff and officials at the beginning, we could get the study started sooner and

wouldn't have the microphone problems, etc., because we would have people who are already accustomed to it.

On the other hand, in some committees there has been a choice that, after all the testimony has been heard, to then hear the minister and to ask questions that may be raised in the exploration.

This is just so we can relay it to the parliamentary secretary and the minister's office through the committee as to when you'd like the minister and officials. Really it's a question of where the committee stands on that.

• (1600)

**The Chair:** I would say first that the motion specifically calls for the Minister of Seniors and departmental officials to appear for one hour each, but it does not specify whether they should come at the beginning or the end, so there are two questions for discussion, colleagues.

Can we adopt the standard procedure with respect to witness schedule and prioritization?

What are your thoughts with respect to the timing of the appearance of the minister and officials?

Go ahead, Ms. Falk.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, MP Vaughan.

My opinion would be that, at some point on the duration of the study.... I think MP Vaughan did bring up a good point that, if the minister and officials can come even near the beginning, that also gives a bit of a buffer for the clerk when it comes to witnesses and that whole microphone kerfuffle that we seem to get to enjoy quite often.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Chabot, you have the floor.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** I think it would be more interesting for a minister to be present at the end of the proceedings or the study rather than at the beginning, as was the case during the review of the employment insurance system. In fact, Minister Qualtrough came closer to the end, when the work was being concluded. When some work has been done, and I think it could be more conclusive. That is my proposal.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Vaughan.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** In all these situations, ministerial availability is always the challenge in case they're pre-booked. What we will do is endeavour to get her first, and if not first, we'll tell you when her availability is, but I think getting her first gets the study started sooner. The sooner we get into the study, the sooner we get to the rest of the work that we have in front of us. We will get back to you at the next meeting with an answer as quickly as possible.

I think the will of the committee normally is for first. We just offered options because there may need to be options, but let's work for first, and if we don't get first, we'll update you on when.

**The Chair:** Okay.

With respect to the prioritization of witnesses and the development of panels, can we proceed as set out in the routine motions? Is there any further discussion on that? Do we have consensus to proceed in that fashion?

I believe we do. Thank you.

Finally, can we set a deadline for the receipt of briefs? If we assume the next six meetings, that would take us into at least the first week of June when you consider that there is one week there. I would suggest that probably the earliest we could get through the six meetings would be the first week of June. I'm guided by the committee in terms of a deadline for the submission of briefs, but I do believe that's something that should be included in our press release.

Mr. Vis.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Yes, I agree, Mr. Chair. Maybe we should not extend the submission of briefs beyond our last meeting for hearing from witnesses. That way, all committee members will have a sufficient amount of time to review any correspondence received. I know that in previous studies it has been difficult to keep up when briefs sometimes were received following the completion of witness testimony.

**The Chair:** If we begin the study on May 13 and count six meetings from there, that takes us to June 3. That assumes no interruptions. That would be the quickest we could do it, so I would propose an end date of June 2 for the submission of briefs. Is there any discussion on that? Very well; we'll set five o'clock eastern time on June 2 as the deadline for the submission of briefs.

Ms. Dancho, go ahead.

• (1605)

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Mr. Chair, my apologies. I'm just counting.... We don't have committee meetings during a break week. Is that correct?

**The Chair:** Well, I'm in the hands of the committee, but unless the committee wishes that to happen, normally we would not. That said, I'm not opposed to it if that's the will of the committee.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Okay. Perhaps that's a discussion we could have.

I just wanted to make sure that if we're not counting that week, it was actually the 13th, 25th, 27th, the 1st and the 3rd, and then it would be the following week, the 8th of June, I think it would be, unless I'm incorrect. I just wanted to make sure. It might be that the 8th might be the last day. It's a difference of just a couple of days, but I wanted to make sure that I wasn't off on my calendar if we start next Thursday, skip a week and there are six.

**The Chair:** You are correct. Should we change the 3rd to the 7th?

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** I think it would be prudent.

**The Chair:** Yes. Okay. We're good for the 7th.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** All right. We have consensus on that point.

Is there any further business to come before the meeting in public? If not, I'm going to propose that we suspend and move in camera for consideration of the urban, rural and northern indigenous housing study. Is there any further business for the public portion of the meeting?

Seeing none, the meeting is suspended. I would encourage you to log off and log back in with the link you've been provided for the in camera portion of the meeting.

Thank you very much, colleagues. We'll see you *à huis clos*.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]







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