



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

FEWO • NUMBER 002 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, October 28, 2004

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Chair

Ms. Anita Neville

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•(1110)

[*English*]

The Chair (Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): I wonder if we could begin, please.

I would like to welcome you all back. We're beginning what I guess is the second official meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Can I check that everybody has received a copy of the report of the subcommittee on agenda? Has everybody received it?

Is there any comment or discussion on the report of the subcommittee, which met to try to get our work underway? If not, is somebody prepared to move the adoption of this report?

It is moved by Beth Phinney.

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

•(1115)

The Chair: As a result of the meeting on Tuesday, Julie Cool, as our parliamentary library support, has proposed a work plan. It is a work plan based on the discussions that came out of Tuesday's meeting, but I want to stress that it's open for discussion, to hear your thoughts on it. Just take a minute, have a look at it, and then we'll see.

Our usual practice will be to try to have reports out to you ahead of time, but to do so this time would have pre-empted accepting the report of the subcommittee. Just take a minute to have a look at it, and we'll open the meeting up for discussion.

Do you need another minute?

I have been advised by the clerk that it's not necessary to follow the formal speaking order we agreed to unless there is a delegation present or witnesses before us. So what I am proposing is, as I see a hand go up, to keep a speaking order and respond that way, trying to keep my eyes alert.

I have Paddy and then Jean

Hon. Paddy Torsney (Burlington, Lib.): First of all, I think it is terrific that we have Julie as our researcher, and the work plan looks terrific.

In terms of trying to define some goals for the witnesses and a context for the issues that are of concern to women, given that we're working on a plan moving forward to December and that the House doesn't really sit in January, and then we have February, and all of a sudden in March you have the "Beijing plus ten" meeting, which has

a pretty active agenda from the original Beijing meeting, I'm wondering if there isn't some way we could help tie together some of the themes or figure out if we could have input into what I gather will be Minister Frulla's report to that meeting. It could just be a simple matter of pulling out some of the questions, reviewing them or making sure people have access to them.

[*Translation*]

We may have a few questions for witnesses, or we may want to submit a report to the minister. We don't necessarily have to do something very formal, but it would be advisable that we do something like that. As a new committee I think that we have more opportunities.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Jean.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): I agree with the work plan as laid out. The only comment I would have is that the subcommittee also had a very brief discussion on the possibility of being involved in the pre-budget consultations as well. I understand we didn't have timeframes and a complete understanding of the mechanism for it at this point; however, I think it would be important to have some voice from this committee in the pre-budget consultations.

I also want to say I support Ms. Torsney's comments about Beijing plus ten.

The Chair: Thank you. You're absolutely right to remind us, because we did speak about the budget consultation. I'm not quite sure how we'll work that in, but we'll think about it.

Paddy.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: I think there are some really good possibilities around the budget. Whether or not it 's a formal submission from this committee to the other committee or into its process, I would encourage particularly new members to make sure their colleagues who are sitting on the finance committee get the voices of the people who are working on issues important to women across the country onto the witness list.

I know, as the former vice-chair of the committee, that all too often there were panels that were either 95% or 100% of one gender and not the other. You can have a better discussion about the issues if you have more voices rather than fewer: just as men don't always agree, women don't always have to agree either. Certainly we can get a better dialogue, and some of the issues that are important, I think, can be raised. Make sure the main witness list for the budget includes the voices you want to be heard, and we could reinforce that message too.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you. They'll do it for you.

[Translation]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): At the organization meeting I spoke about budgets. I wanted to know what percentage of public expenditures was being allocated to issues relating to women's equality. We could ask some more specific questions in this regard. We know that this committee will be working to further women's equality. So it would be good for us to know what part of public funds is devoted to that.

[English]

The Chair: I was just going to answer something to that, but go ahead.

[Translation]

Hon. Paddy Torsney: The easiest thing to do would be to ask questions on the main estimates. If the minister comes here we can ask her what amounts she has to allocate to various areas, and what the priorities are. We could also study the report of the Standing Committee on Finance in order to have a look at all of the choices. They are selecting witnesses now.

[English]

The Chair: I'm also wondering if at the first meeting next week, when the Treasury Board Secretariat and the Office of the Auditor General appear before the committee, that might be an opportunity to ask those kinds of questions of them.

Mr. Powers.

Mr. Russ Powers (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

There's a document here I'll be more than happy to share. This has been produced by the parliamentary information and research service, and it was done for the government operations and estimates committee. It's "Committees and Estimates: Powers and Possible Strategies". It was originally done in January of last year, but it has been revised as of October this year. It's a document about eleven pages long, and I have an extra copy if you would like it duplicated and distributed. I've gone through it in preparation for government operations, which is meeting as we speak. It's a very good introduction to the issues raised by the honourable member.

The Chair: Then perhaps if you could share that with the clerk, she would send it out in both official languages. I'm sure it was prepared for the government operations committee in both official languages.

Are there comments on the work plan as it's laid out? Is everybody comfortable with it?

I think we'll feel our way as we move forward. That would mean we would have Treasury Board and the Auditor General before the committee next Tuesday, November 2, to talk about the budgeting. We can ask all the questions you want on how we move forward. The following meeting, on the fourth, would be a briefing from Status of Women Canada on the department as it is operating right now. Then after the break we would look at the first meeting to be with stakeholders on a response to the estimates for Status of Women Canada, including the report on planning and priorities. Following that we'd have the minister.

We would ask all members of the committee, if we move towards establishing round tables, that you start to submit names of representatives from organizations who you know or who you think would be important to have at round tables. We had a discussion, and I would welcome your input as to whether the round tables should be on a thematic basis or whether they should be broad-based, trying to accommodate groups and create a different kind of synergy on women's issues. As I say, I would welcome some direction from the committee on that.

Mr. Powers.

• (1125)

Mr. Russ Powers: Madam Chair, I'd given some thought to some possible groupings. Maybe they're appropriate or not appropriate, but under the broad titles of "women and global issues", "women and health", "women and social issues", and "women and justice"—I'm looking at what was referenced on page 3—we might readily be able to deal with all the elements. Or perhaps something's missing. In other words, if we had broad umbrella titles, certainly everything that's been raised by my colleagues at this committee, and I'm sure more that will come out raised by external groups and ourselves, would probably find a place under these particular umbrellas. It would allow the round tables the opportunity to most appropriately discuss the issues under that umbrella. Those are just my thoughts.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any comments on Mr. Powers'...?

Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you, Madam Chair.

This is just on a point of clarification. I'm not clear, when you're talking about women and global issues, what that category would look like. I would presume that these categories wouldn't preclude people from speaking to other issues as they emerge, because my understanding of the intent of the round table was to gather information from women's organizations to help direct the committee in terms of its focus.

The Chair: Ms. Torsney.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: The first question is whether it is helpful to group under themes. Obviously, never restricting anybody would be my suggestion, but it is helpful, because sometimes there's an energy that builds when you at least have a theme such as "women and workplace issues" or "women and health". Yes, of course the financial status of women affects their health, and yes, of course the environment affects their health, but at least it helps people start to focus a little bit. I think most people should be open-minded about hearing the other issues. Maybe it's a point of departure for another theme, but I would think it would be helpful.

I would probably add "aboriginal women" as a table because personally I think there are a lot of issues emerging. I think violence, which Julie had put in her paper, is covered in justice. I think it might be better in fact to go broader. I would also hope we'd think about newer Canadians, refugee women, and that kind of thing under global issues, perhaps.

But whatever the themes are, it is also very helpful to the clerk generally to direct people to where there's going to be the most interest and the most dynamism among the witnesses, and you can get a kind of buzz going on certain themes.

The Chair: Ms. Kadis.

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): I concur with Paddy. I think it's very important, especially in view of recent—I think it was just yesterday—reports regarding new immigrants, new Canadians, not only that we have that basis of representation from the organizations we know already but that we also bring in new voices as well. We have to have that latitude; otherwise, I think we may do part of the job but not all the job and not be as current.

The Chair: Madame.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): I think that we forgot some things in the topics we have here. Under women and work, we have to add the family. Another specific theme is that of women and poverty. This involves single-parent families headed by women, and other similar situations. Women are the ones who are poor, by and large, and they are the ones who have to deal with all of that. With globalization and everything that comes with it, women are increasingly likely to work outside the home and they are the ones that are grappling with all of this. All aspects of the issue are related. I think it would be essential that we study specific themes to touch on the most important points that concern women.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Crowder.

• (1130)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Just to come back, I agree to having some themes. When we were talking about women and global issues, I was concerned about the issues around women and work, women and family, and women and poverty. I didn't know where they would be captured if we collapsed the themes to health, global, and justice. I was concerned that we'd be losing a very important aspect of women's lives, and that's economics.

The Chair: Thank you.

We talked about that too. I'm wondering if we can use Mr. Powers' suggestion as a broad guideline: women and the family, poverty.... One of my concerns is the economic security of women, particularly senior women, many of whom are living in poverty. If we combined that under the social, would that work? I think we would have to do it in a fairly flexible manner, recognizing there'd be overlap. Nothing is easily pigeonholed.

Ms. Torsney.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Is there broad consensus that women and work would be one of them? I think there are specific workplace issues: pay issues—

The Chair: Pensions.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Pension issues could come under that. Women and health, I think, is probably one that really has a ton of things underneath it.

Oh, and by the way, for women and work I think you'd need to think about agricultural women and work. It could cut across several things, but we'd want to make sure we had women from rural environments represented in some of these panels too.

Justice, I think, covers off violence, because it's broader in terms of equality and justice and those kinds of things. Social, I think, covers the effects of policy and a whole bunch of others.

Are we up to five or to six?

The Chair: I think we're at five, as I see it.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: And aboriginal...?

The Chair: No, that would take it up to six. I also wonder whether you think it would be important to integrate aboriginal concerns in some of the others as well, that it not be only a unit for aboriginal women's concerns.

This will give us a good start. It will probably create an agenda that may take us a very long time to address, but we can choose where we want to begin. We'll start with trying to establish round tables. If everybody can put forward names of people, we will take them to the liaison committee for funding, in order to bring groups in and/or use the video facilities available.

One of the things that's coming to my mind as I'm listening to this is that many of the organizations we will be hearing from speak to all of these issues. Do we want to ask everyone to come, or do we want to confine it at some level? I think that's something we want to make a decision about. Or do you want to think about it?

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Can I suggest that the chair and the clerk, with input from members of Parliament around the table, make some decisions? Yes, the Chamber of Commerce women's committee—if there is such a thing—would have a view on a whole series of issues, but perhaps they could be targeted.

Where some groups have an umbrella, they may have a committee that would be better to appear on this one versus that one. Maybe there's some flexibility as to whether or not they really have expertise, or whether they just want to talk on every committee.

The Chair: My concern is that we hear from as many groups as possible.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Yes—and the people best able.

The Chair: Flexibility will be the operative word.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle: There are certainly a lot of groups, and our time is limited. However, we could first of all hear the women's groups who have explored certain issues and who do what is known in Quebec as advocacy work. These people already have some expertise with regard to some major issues. This could be interesting.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that we all feel that the creation of this committee has raised a lot of expectations. A lot of women's groups are coming to see us. Given the diversity of issues, once we have heard a certain number of groups, we can set some priorities so that we can achieve some good results.

• (1135)

[*English*]

The Chair: You'll notice in the proposed timeline Julie has prepared for us that there are three meetings identified for national organizations, and three for thematic. Maybe we should be flexible with that and have the national organizations appear in one, two, or three meetings, and then set up some thematic round tables. Would that work?

Okay, is there anything further?

Ms. Torsney.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: I would also like to suggest that we circulate Julie Cool's paper on Beijing plus ten. It was written for an Inter-Parliamentary Union discussion, and all members of Parliament can be members of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. It's the oldest and largest network of members of Parliament. Canada currently occupies the presidency of the gender partnership group through a woman from the Senate, Senator Fraser.

In the paper Julie wrote there is an appendix, with the strategic objectives for the Beijing platform broken down. Some of the themes we've picked up are not in our groupings—or maybe Julie's going to prepare something else. But it would help us focus or perhaps see some opportunities to effect change, or to fit within that other broader context on what Canada's obligations are, as well. So it might be another helpful....

[*Translation*]

I think that these documents were prepared in English and in French.

[*English*]

The Chair: We can send that out fairly quickly. That would be great.

Is there anything further?

Then I think we have the beginnings of a work plan, and we start working on Tuesday.

Could I have a motion from somebody to accept the proposed schedule we've discussed?

It is moved by Susan Kadis, seconded by Nina Grewal.

Ms. Crowder, you wanted to speak.

Ms. Jean Crowder: It's not about this issue.

The Chair: It's not about this issue? Okay.

Is there any discussion on the timeline?

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

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms. Jean Crowder: This is a procedural question. I wondered when we would get the material for our meeting on Tuesday.

The Chair: We're going to try very hard to get all the material out ahead of time. My understanding is that the departmental estimates have already been sent to your offices. We will try to operate on the practice of having it sent the day before.

The reason you didn't have it today was that the work plan had to be adopted before we moved forward.

Go ahead, Ms. Phinney.

Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Since this is a brand-new committee and it's not quite sure yet where we're going on this or how we're going to proceed, I wonder if for each of the dates we have in here—November 2, 4, 16, and 18, and that's just two weeks—we could designate 15 minutes of the meeting with no witness, maybe the last 15 minutes at the end of the meeting, to go over what we're deciding back in our offices and when we're talking to people. This would be to have 15 minutes at each meeting to touch base again.

The Chair: Is that agreeable?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: That's a good idea. Thank you.

Could we have a formal motion on it, please?

Ms. Beth Phinney: I move that we allocate the last 15 minutes of each meeting to just the committee members so that we could discuss the progress of the organization of the committee.

The Chair: Is there any disagreement?

(Motion agreed to)

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you.

Does anybody else have any further comments, questions, input, or discussion?

Thank you very much. The meeting is adjourned.

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