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of Persons with Disabilities**

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**Chair**

**Ms. Raymonde Folco**

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

Thursday, May 12, 2005

• (1245)

[English]

**The Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.)):** Ladies and gentlemen, we're now in a public hearing.

This is a general discussion, and once again I would like to bring to the attention of the members of the committee present that I regret that, in the first place, concerning yesterday afternoon's special meeting to finish and to adopt the report of this committee, we were not able to go through with the work that we had all decided we would do, because of the absence of all the members from the Conservative Party and from the Bloc québécois.

I regret also that this is happening again this morning. So although we have been able to go through and read the report and all the members present agree to the text and to the recommendations, nonetheless, because we do not have quorum in the absence of the Conservative members and the Bloc québécois members, we are not able to adopt this report and therefore will not be able to table it in the House of Commons until this problem is resolved.

I will now let members speak on a number of subjects. I'll start with Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP):** First of all, I want to thank everybody for their participation in this very important discussion. It was at times difficult, but good work is always difficult. If people are playing their roles and coming to the table, sincerely wanting to make sure that whatever happens is in the best interests of everybody concerned, then it's been my experience that you have to stay with it, be willing to stay in the conversation until such time as you can arrive at something that you think is constructive and positive.

I'm pleased that we're at a point where we may be able to table a report. But it's unfortunate that it will not be soon, that it's not going to be today or tomorrow. As everybody knows, and we have them before us here, there are a significant number of people out there in our communities—community organizations, volunteer groups, NGOs, not-for-profit organizations—that are delivering services that are under a bit of a cloud at the moment because of this new approach to requests for proposals and the application of such over the last few months. That has been shared with us by the ministry and it has been agreed to by the ministry that it's flawed.

So it would be good to get some recommendations quickly to the ministry so some of that can be corrected, some stability can be brought into the whole sector, and some continuity can be brought

back in terms of the voluntary sector agreement and how HRSDC does this kind of work. There are groups out there that have actually lost their funding, that are in the process of being assessed, and they are wondering what the criteria are that will be used to assess them.

They're waiting, the groups themselves, and most particularly—and this was raised by Mr. Forseth on a couple of occasions—the clients themselves. That's what we have to be most concerned about here, the folks out there—women, immigrants, the disabled, all kinds of groups—who are challenged in terms of their ability to get into the economy, who need support, who need counselling, who need help. I think it is in everybody's best interest.

I was elected to come here, part of a minority government, to get some work done. I thought we'd have some time in fact to do that. Now, there are some very serious concerns where the Gomery inquiry is concerned. My view is, let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater here. That will, in the fullness of time, be dealt with, and those who are guilty will be dealt with as well.

In the meantime, we have a government to run. We have a country to be in charge of, and the decisions we make that flow out of here will affect that. I think it's irresponsible of us not to take advantage of every moment, every opportunity we have, every second we have here, to move that forward, to do our work, to be present, and to be promoting an agenda that's in the larger best interests of the country as a whole.

I'm disappointed that we've ended up where we have, at a juncture where we are ready to make some very important and valuable recommendations, and now our hands are tied. I'm hoping that maybe after next Thursday, when we have a vote on the budget and that budget is passed.... We think it's a good budget. I think the negotiations that went on between the Prime Minister and our leader, Mr. Layton, were very genuine and sincere efforts to find a way to keep the government alive, to provide more services to communities and people out there, and to better the lot of Canadians in general. And it should be passed. Thursday will only be a vote at, what is it, second reading? There's still a lot of process to go after that. There's the Senate and all of that. We need time to get that budget through.

That was the commitment we made. That was the commitment our leader made to the Prime Minister, that in the equation, we would stay at the table until such time as that was done. After that, well, we'll see what happens next. We still feel very strongly about that.

•(1250)

We still feel committed to that agenda and that program, and we're as disappointed as everybody else around the table that this is not the direction we're going in.

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

We appreciate it. We've had our differences, but this is what discussion is about. We are trying to move forward toward a common ground. I think we have found it, with minor differences. We all agree on where we want to go. So thank you for your contribution to the committee.

I feel as though this is the last meeting of the committee. I would like to think this is not the case, even though that's the feeling I get around the table.

**Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Ahuntsic, Lib.):** We're here until next week.

**The Chair:** Everybody is going to be here next Tuesday for sure.

Who would like to speak now?

Mr. Adams.

**Hon. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.):** I would like to echo the remarks made by you and Tony Martin in expressing my deep regret that this committee report has not been tabled already. I hope it will be tabled. We worked hard at it. I want to thank the researchers. I want to thank all of the groups and individuals who appeared before us or communicated with us in writing. I want to thank all of those who dealt with individual members of the committee. We're all of us involved with these not-for-profit groups. We have come to a reasonable conclusion, so I deplore the fact that this is not being tabled. If it is not tabled before the summer, think of the delay and the waste of time in the reaction of a department that does not, for reasons both good and bad, react very promptly anyway. I do regret that, and I thank all my colleagues for their work.

With regard to the February 23 list of issues for future study, I'd like to say that I support a study of the Canada social transfer that Tony Martin suggested. I think such a study would involve travel.

I would like to mention the proposed study of informal caregivers, which is under my name and Raymonde Folco's, and also the study of aboriginal labour market measures delivered by HRSD. Informal caregivers are so important in our communities and family lives. I don't need to say any more about that.

With respect to the aboriginal labour market measures and HRSD, people tend to think that Indian and Northern Affairs is everything as far as the aboriginal community is concerned. It's not. As we all know, but as the general public does not, HRSD has a significant presence in the aboriginal communities across the country. It is time the committee took note of this, particularly as we're establishing a new department.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

•(1255)

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

Monsieur D'Amours.

[*Translation*]

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

In the first place, I would like to say that I am extremely happy with our work. However, I deplore what is happening not only at this committee, but also at other committees. We were told the same thing on several occasions. We invite witnesses to come and tell us their complaints, explain their particular situation. Unfortunately, some political parties, today, do not respect the fact that these people have invested time, money and a great deal of goodwill to prepare themselves to come here and try to further things. I want to congratulate the members who are here today, because in my opinion, we did do some extraordinary work. The work that remains to be done is even more important, since it is to table a report that would allow improvements to be made to better the situation, not of politicians, but of individuals who are in the field and who need it most.

I remember that on June 28, 2004, the population gave us the mandate to work as a minority government. I have never experienced anything else, since this is my first mandate. I was never part of a majority government. However, I greatly appreciate the work that a minority government can do. In fact, we can push some files ahead, on one side or the other of the House of Commons. This aims at improving the well-being of the population and the quality of life of citizens.

In fact, the same citizens did not give us the mandate, on June 28, 2004, of deciding how we should act. They did not give the government mandate to do whatever it wanted. They asked us to listen to them and to work together to do everything in our power for them. It is deplorable to see that the six members of the committee are missing around this table today. The same six members of Parliament will say that Parliament does not work, while there are people who are investing their time. Let's not forget that we are paid for what we do. I think it is important to stress that. We are here and we keep working. We can really help things to get ahead.

It is ironic. When I was city councillor, we were penalized, financially, if we did not attend meetings of the city council. We were not paid some particular amounts. In the last two days, I have been thinking about that. I was here yesterday afternoon. I feel that maybe we should do something similar, in order to make sure that members of committees be here as they were mandated to be by the Canadians.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

•(1300)

**The Chair:** I was just going to say that maybe, a Member of Parliament should make such a motion.

Mrs. Ratansi, it is your turn.

[*English*]

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to echo the sentiments that have already been expressed. I sit on the environment and sustainable development committee as well, and we have a report coming out on the Kyoto Protocol. That report is very critical for the health of all Canadians.

I feel it is a shame. We have witnesses at the moment from Sweden and Norway, and it is disrespectful for the Bloc and the Conservatives not to be there when, as everybody has echoed, we were elected as a minority government to work as a minority and not to grandstand.

I'd like to quote from one of the articles from the *StarPhoenix* of Saskatoon, that says, "Governing substance, not opposition grandstanding", and that the grandstanding that has been taking place by the Conservatives and the Bloc is not healthy.

There is so much to be achieved. We have a new child care agreement. We have the Kyoto Protocol implementation. We have this report that is very critical to the health and well-being of a number of communities. I think it's very important. I feel sad that we were not able to adopt the report. I feel sad that we will not be able to complete our Kyoto report as well.

That is number one.

Number two, I concur with Mr. Adams that the study on informal caregivers is critical. I have in my constituency a lot of informal caregivers. They are the sandwich generation, and they are being impacted by it.

So if that study could be done, and the study of the aboriginal market, that would be excellent.

Thank you.

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

Madame Bakopanos, go ahead, please.

**Hon. Eleni Bakopanos:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, I also want to thank the researchers and the clerks, and even the translators, who we sometimes forget to thank, for their hard work. Thank you. Merci beaucoup.

I would like to echo some of the other sentiments of the other members, but most of all I wanted to tell Mr. Martin that we have had our differences, but not in substance. I think your heart is certainly in the right place, and so is mine, in terms of seeing that those organizations out there giving a service to a community are properly provided for by this government. That was also my motivation in terms of working on this report.

Having worked with some of those organizations in another capacity, but at the same time in my role as parliamentary secretary, I can tell you that I will continue the fight, and I deplore the fact that we're unable to give guidance to the department and guidance to the minister, but we can do it orally, certainly.

I and the other members on this side, and I'm sure you also, should continue to press the minister for as long as she is the minister of that department for those changes to be implemented. I know when Lucienne Robillard, the minister, came before this committee, she said she is looking at changes in any case. The report would have been a guide to show her that in fact we should continue, and I intend to continue. I know she continues to press for changes in order to assure that those services that were being given in the community will continue to be given.

I want to say also that I deplore the fact that there were certain members from both the Conservatives and Bloc who said they wanted to see certain changes made; unfortunately, today their absence speaks louder than their words, in my opinion. I hope perhaps by next week, enlightened by the fact that we are here, they will join us so we can in fact adopt this report and table it in the House. I would hate to think that all the work and all the passion that has gone into this at the same time, and the input of all the witnesses who took, as Mr. D'Amours said, their time to come before this committee and give us guidance in terms of writing this report won't be for naught.

I want to thank all the members, and I also want to thank you, Madam Chair. Let's hope that next week when we continue with witnesses, we can in fact have appropriate quorum in order to adopt this report.

**The Chair:** Thank you, everyone.

I would like to say a very short word on number 6, a study on informal caregivers. I already presented this to Mr. Adams earlier this year. I would like to add a bit of information.

It so happens that 2005 will be the 50th anniversary of the coming of the caregivers from the West Indies. You remember this was the very first acceptable legal immigration of people of colour from the West Indies, or anywhere else for that matter. So I think it would be very pertinent, apart from all the other factors that you know of, which would point us towards looking at this, to bring this up as quickly as possible. I don't think it requires a great deal of study, quite frankly. I think we all know where we stand on this. Perhaps we could mention the contribution that a certain number of people have made who became the beginning of a new immigration to Canada in the last 50 years, who have made an important contribution to our culture and to our economy. That is something we might be able to add in.

Once again, members, thank you so much. Thank you particularly for having come this afternoon. We will try to continue, as you all have suggested, and we will try to table the report as soon as it is legally possible to do so. Thank you so much.

The meeting is adjourned.





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