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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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• (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Order, please.

Pursuant to Standing Orders 81(4) and 81(7), the committee will now commence its study on the main estimates for human resources and skills development, as well as its study on the report on plans and priorities of Human Resources and Social Development Canada for the fiscal year 2007-2008.

Just before we start, though, in the name of the committee I'd like to welcome, somewhere in the back of the room there, a delegation from the Pakistani Parliament. They will be in Ottawa during the week of May 14 especially to learn more about the work of the House of Commons and the committees. I just want to welcome our friends from the Pakistani Parliament.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: I'm hoping that all my colleagues will behave themselves today, even though we are being televised, which I know everyone's aware of.

I will now call vote 1 in order to begin a review of the main estimates. We have the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development with us, as well as the Minister of Labour.

Gentlemen, I want to welcome you and thank you for being here today and taking the time out of your busy schedules.

You will make some statements, and that will be followed by a question and answer session from the members.

I know that some of my Liberal colleagues were suggesting that we could go right to questions because they had the report already, but I thought we would still give you a chance to go ahead with your statement.

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I should start by introducing my colleagues at the table. Of course Jean-Pierre Blackburn, Minister of Labour, is with me; his deputy minister, Munir Sheikh, is here, as is my deputy minister, Janice Charette. Next to Janice is H el ene Gosselin, associate deputy minister responsible for Service Canada; next to H el ene is Karen Kinsley, who is the president of CMHC; and next to Karen is Sherry Harrison, who is the comptroller for the department.

Mr. Chair, I am pleased to appear before this committee to talk about the 2007-2008 main estimates and the report on plans and priorities of my department.

[*Translation*]

I am accompanied by my esteemed colleague, the Minister of Labour, the Honourable Jean-Pierre Blackburn, who will talk about the activities and plans of the Labour Program within Human Resources and Social Development Canada.

[*English*]

Of the \$84 billion in planned expenditures for my department, nearly 93% will be in direct benefits. They range from child care, student support, and skills development to employment insurance, the Canada Pension Plan, and old age security.

The HRSDC main estimates exclude employment insurance—\$16 billion—and the Canada Pension Plan—\$28 billion—for benefits and administrative costs funded from those two accounts.

The 2007-2008 main estimates total \$40.5 billion, a net increase of \$5.1 billion over the 2006-2007 main estimates of \$35.4 billion. The increase is primarily due to new funding for the universal child care benefits, the lump-sum payments recognizing the impact of Indian residential schools, and increases for statutory programs, which include old age security, guaranteed income supplements, and allowance payments.

Mr. Chair, I have recently had the opportunity to cross the country and see firsthand how our department touches the lives of Canadians and helps them fulfill their potential. Service Canada is central to my department and to the broader government, touching the lives of millions of Canadians. Service Canada is about improving service to Canadians. I'm proud to say that Service Canada provides access to more than 50 Government of Canada programs and services over the Internet, in person, or by telephone.

I'm also proud of our expansion into rural and remote areas. Over last year, our government added 170 points of service. Residents of Fort Resolution on the shores of Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories, for example, recently got help accessing programs and services, thanks to several Service Canada employees who made a 320-kilometre round trip from the local service centre in Hay River, rather than waiting for the residents to come to them.

Residents of the communities of Grise Fiord and Resolute and Nunavut also recently had a chance to find out about our programs through two trade fairs organized by Service Canada employees and the Baffin Chamber of Commerce. Some Canadians are now receiving their first direct contact with the federal government. Citizen service agents are providing scheduled outreach visits to several communities along the James Bay coast in northern Ontario that are only accessible by plane. Plans are also under way to begin offering services in Cree.

[Translation]

Many more Canadians are getting the services and benefits they need. Providing Canadians with excellent services is no longer just a goal, but a concrete reality.

[English]

Let me now outline for you some of our government's actions to support Canadians in their family life, at work, and in their communities. Mr. Chair, today is International Day of Families. Every day Canadian families face challenges balancing work and family responsibilities and making decisions on how to raise their children. That's why our government has now presented two budgets aimed at providing choice for Canadians. These measures are making a difference, Mr. Chair.

In fact, this year we will be providing nearly \$5.6 billion—three times the previous government—in direct spending, tax measures, and transfers to support early learning and child care. Universal child care benefit provides \$2.4 billion a year directly to families, and now with Budget 2007, we have committed \$250 million per year to create new child care spaces through the Canada social transfer. This comes on top of the \$850 million we already provide to the provinces and territories in support of early learning and child care programs. Budget 2007 announced further support for families with children, including a 25% non-refundable tax credit to support businesses in creating new child care spaces in the workplace.

I recently had the opportunity to attend the opening of an innovative employer-sponsored child care centre at the University of Waterloo in Ontario. The centre sets up contracts with employers to supply full- and part-time care for children up to 13 years old, as well as temporary child care when the need arises. I can see Canadians working together to create effect choices in child care. I'm very encouraged when parents tell me that they have more choices for their families as a result of our programs and policies.

We have continued to follow through on our commitment to families by recently proposing in the budget a child tax credit for up to \$310 per child under the age of 18. More than three million Canadian families would see their tax burden reduced. We have also proposed a new measure, similar to the registered education savings plan, that will benefit families who have children with severe disabilities. I'm sure that every one of us knows someone who faces the daunting financial challenge of caring for a child with a disability. The registered disability savings plan is designed to help ease that financial burden.

• (1540)

[Translation]

We have also done a great deal on behalf of seniors.

[English]

At the beginning of this year, the Prime Minister appointed the Honourable Marjory LeBreton as Secretary of State for seniors. In March, we announced the creation of a National Seniors Council to advise the government on issues of national importance. Budget 2007 had an increase in the age credit amount and pension income splitting. The recent passage of Bill C-36 will make it easier for seniors to apply for and receive their benefits.

This government also believes that investing in post-secondary education today will help bridge the skills gap, so future generations can access learning and employment opportunities of the future. That's why Budget 2007 proposed to increase the lifetime contributions and the annual contribution limits of registered education savings plans, as well as increase the Canada education savings grant. In addition, Budget 2007 proposed the biggest investment in post-secondary education since the inception of the Canada social transfer, an increase of more than 40% in transfers to provinces and territories in this area.

We are also delivering policies and programs that help bridge the gap in the labour market between employers who need workers and Canadians who need jobs. The budget establishes a new architecture for labour market policy, the centerpiece of which is a \$500 million a year contribution in new funding for the provinces to help get training for those who are not eligible to receive EI. Our goal is to create the skilled, adaptable workforce Canada needs. In the final analysis, this translates into opportunities for individual workers to create Canada's knowledge advantage.

We live in a very special time in the history of the Canadian economy and its labour force. The challenge used to be people seeking jobs. Now we have jobs seeking people, especially when it comes to skilled workers.

Last January, for example, our government launched the apprenticeship incentive grant. Up to 100,000 apprentices will be eligible for grants to help cover the cost of tuition, travel, and tools. I was recently in Edmonton, Mr. Chairman, where I had the opportunity to present the first \$1,000 cheque under the apprenticeship incentive grant at a steel fabricating plant, Wayward Steel. The smile on that young rig technician's face told me, Mr. Chairman, that we were absolutely on the right track with this new grant.

Our government is also producing programs that encourage employment for under-represented groups such as recent immigrants, persons with disabilities, and aboriginal Canadians.

[Translation]

Immigrants now account for a much larger proportion of Canada's population growth. We need the skills of these newcomers.

• (1545)

[English]

In the past year I announced enhancements to the temporary foreign worker program, including regional lists of occupations under pressure, and working groups in Alberta and B.C. that are designed to alleviate worker shortages.

In Calgary, last March, I announced funding for a program that will develop an online tool to help immigrants before coming to Canada upgrade their essential skills to meet the requirements of the Canadian workforce. We've also targeted other groups to help ensure that they can bring their skills to the workplace to help us bridge the gap.

When I was recently in Digby, Nova Scotia, I met a woman whose disability had made her feel that she was unemployable. With the help of the skills link program, she found a position with a retail chain. She was pretty thrilled about making a contribution to her community and the positive impact that the job would have on her life. Mr. Chairman, she told a very touching story at that time, and I couldn't help but feel a personal sense of pride in the skills link program that was helping her.

[Translation]

Mr. Chairman, there are many more stories like this one.

[English]

For example, when I visited a youth project in north Regina, I met a young aboriginal man who had experienced some pretty tough times. Participating in a youth program had motivated him to work towards creating his own business of renovating houses and flipping property.

We've also reached out to support aboriginal people. I'm very pleased that our recent budget proposed to double the investment under the aboriginal skills and employment partnership program. We propose to add another \$105 million to this program, and I'm sure we'll see more success stories like these in years to come.

Last year the government invested some \$175.5 million to support over 1,140 homelessness-related projects. We also committed \$269.6 million over the next two years on a new homelessness partnering strategy. This strategy will work to find more effective and sustainable solutions to prevent and reduce homelessness, and improve the quality of life for Canada's most vulnerable citizens.

We also recently announced a two-year extension of CMHC's renovation programs, worth \$256 million, to help bring housing for low-income households up to basic health and safety standards.

CMHC is spending \$1 billion per year to create affordable housing through bilateral affordable housing agreements with the provinces and territories. It also spends about \$1.8 billion to support some 633,000 existing social housing units across Canada.

The 2006 federal budget also provided \$1.4 billion for affordable housing, northern housing, and housing for aboriginal people living off reserve. Along with my colleague, Minister Prentice, I recently announced the creation of a \$300 million first nations market housing fund. This fund follows through on the 2007 budget commitment to develop a housing market in first nations across this

country. It also represents a fundamental shift in how Canada's new government supports housing on reserve. Up to 25,000 new housing units over 10 years could be provided through this fund.

Mr. Chairman, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of the contributions made by the individual employees of my department.

[Translation]

Through their hard work and dedication, we are making an impact on the lives of Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Chair, this committee will note that in the report on plans and priorities, we have made a commitment to Canadians, to our own employees, and to taxpayers. We will use their money wisely to achieve results and value for money.

When I travel the country and see a human face on the results that we achieve, I know we are on the right track. We are reaching people; we are helping them fulfill their potential.

I would be pleased to welcome the committee's questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Solberg.

It sounds to me as if you've been very busy and doing lots of good work.

I'm sure all the members will want to find out more about it as we get to questions—

Hon. Monte Solberg: I'm sure they do.

The Chair: —after Mr. Blackburn goes.

Minister Blackburn, welcome. You have some opening remarks first, and then we will get to questions.

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

This is the third time I have had the honour of coming before you. Today I will also have the opportunity to update you on the changes and progress that have taken place since our last meeting.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, I would like to recall the fact that Canada's workplace is where our nation's wealth is generated. It's where most citizens spend a considerable part of their lives. It is also where creativity and innovation take root. The quality of a workplace is therefore fundamental to the economic and social quality of life of citizens. So it is crucial that we focus on the quality of that workplace. Here's how we do that.

First, as members know, one of the main sectors of activity of the Labour Program is labour-management relations. We provide assistance for dispute resolutions. This assistance includes mediation and conciliation services in settling collective bargaining and other industrial disputes. Second, we must ensure we have the right laws, regulations and rules governing the workplace—developed to be flexible to meet the needs of a changing world. Third, we achieve our objective through compliance and enforcement of these laws, regulations and rules.

The role of our conciliation and mediation services in successfully assisting unions and employers in resolving their collective bargaining disputes is clear: 97% of all Canada Labour Code collective bargaining disputes finalized in 2006-2007 were settled without a work stoppage.

The context for modern laws, regulations and rules is that the nature of the Canadian workplace is changing. For many workers in western industrialized countries, this is a world that has been absolutely transformed in roughly the span of a single generation. Consider this: the percentage of women in the workforce increased from 42% in 1976 to 58% in 2004. Immigrants represent 70% of current population growth—up from 20% in 1976. Self-employment, autonomous workers, telework, casual employment and job sharing have all risen dramatically. The laws that govern our workplace have to keep pace with all of this change. Through modest steps, we are meeting this challenge.

The report entitled *Fairness at Work: Federal Labour Standards for the 21st Century*, prepared for the Government of Canada, makes a series of legislative and administrative recommendations on how to modernize key sections of the Canada Labour Code—fundamental legislation governing federal work standards and workplace conditions. This government continues to seek the views of business and the labour before we decide on a course of action.

Another component of our approach to modern legislation is the Employment Equity Act. In December last year, I was pleased to be informed that this standing committee will be undertaking the five-year review of this act. As mandated by law, this will be the third such review to be carried out since the passage of the act in 1986, when I myself was a member in the House of Commons. Your direction is required. Our government looks forward to working with you in this endeavour.

And here's another example of modern legislation: second-hand smoke in the workplace. I announced today that the government's decisions to amend the Non-Smokers Health Act to ban smoking rooms in federally-regulated workplace. Upon assuming the Office of the Minister of Labour, I asked the department to conduct testing of the quality of air outside smoking rooms in federally-regulated workplaces. I found to the government's satisfaction that there was no leakage of second-hand smoke. I took things a step further and asked the department to test air quality inside the smoking rooms, before people came to work, that is before they went in to the smoking rooms in the morning, when they were on break and a little later during the day.

● (1550)

These tests showed that the air quality inside smoking rooms was very poor—to say the least—even when they were not in use and deteriorated to dangerous levels as smoking increased in the room.

Mr. Chairman, amending regulations to ban smoking rooms will take time but I strongly encourage employers to close their smoking rooms as soon as possible and not wait for the new regulations to take effect. Perhaps you will have questions to ask me about this. If it is your wish, I can expand on this later.

The Wager Protection Program Act is another example of modern legislation. This important new program aims to protect workers who are the most vulnerable in a bankruptcy. The government will provide for the payment of unpaid wages and vacation pay of up to an amount equalling four weeks' maximum insurable earnings under the Employment Insurance Act, or approximately \$3,000, to employees whose employers go bankrupt.

This government is moving forward on technical amendments to the legislation and is keen to have Parliament approve these amendments. So I urge the members of your political parties to move forward in reaching consensus on these amendments. We all know how important this legislation is for working Canadians, and we are ready to move ahead on its passage. As soon as there is a consensus, we will be able to move ahead quickly, in order to give the bill three readings and to refer it to the Senate for further consideration.

Allow me to give you one more example of the kind of new rules we need. New directives have been developed to deal with "refusal to work" situations which provide clarity and consistency in Labour Program decisions. Refusal to work is an essential right of federal workers when facing work situations that could be considered dangerous. The directives follow a three-step process.

First, parties should determine the normal conditions of employment. Second, inspectors should determine if there are deviations from that norm. And third, if there are deviations, inspectors should then determine if it constitutes a danger, thereby justifying the refusal to work. Additional initiatives based on modernized regulations are being developed and include new violence prevention measures and ergonomic regulations.

Before turning to our approach to modern enforcement, let me mention the importance of the need for consensus among workplace parties on new legislation. Even a carefully-crafted law or regulation can prove counterproductive if it is seen as one-sided. Good laws are therefore effective when they are backed up by effective enforcement. But it has also been shown that the most effective approach is to undertake the combination of activities aimed at gaining employers' compliance voluntarily before using the enforcement provisions of a law.

International responsibility, labour management collaboration, and self-regulation are the best tools we have in the modern workplace for achieving compliance with legal obligations. In this context, the role of government increasingly shifts away from blanket coverage by inspectors, and towards education, dissemination of best practices, dispute resolutions, audits, and inspection activities that are more actively targeted to high-risk workplaces and industries.

An example of our approach to modernization is the new Racism Workplace Strategy. One of the most effective ways to gain compliance of employers with legislation is to provide them with the information and the assistance they need to implement certain legislative requirements. For example, employers subject to the Employment Equity Act tell us they are having difficulties achieving the goal of equitable representation of visible minorities and aboriginal people, when members of those two groups experience racial conflicts in the workplace.

● (1555)

That is why we have introduced the strategy to provide information and assistance to employers in removing barriers and in recruiting and retaining members of those two groups in their workforce. I personally have been traveling across the country, meeting employers and employees and I saw the progress first-hand and encouraged continuing efforts to address the issue of racism in the workplace.

Recently we acted on federal pay equity. The government decided to improve compliance with existing requirements for pay equity. Rather than spending a lot of time discussing and attempting to reach consensus on new legislation, we believe that what is most needed is an effective strategy to ensure that employers are fulfilling their obligations.

My approach therefore is to provide information and education for employers, to offer assistance and facilitation for employers who need help, and to carry out the follow-up and monitoring of compliance. As a last resort, enforcement activity will be undertaken by the Canadian Human Rights Commission and tribunal.

Most employers under federal jurisdiction readily comply with their obligations under the Canada Labour Code to pay appropriate wages and overtime rates as required. However, sometimes this is not the case and employees file a complaint with Labour Program officials claiming that there are wages owing to them.

For example, in 2006-2007, the Labour Program assisted nearly 2,000 Canadians to recover their entitlements. In 2007, after investigation, it was determined that there was a total of \$3.7 million in unpaid wages owed to employees. Once these employers were informed of their obligations, they voluntarily paid

nearly \$2 million of those unpaid wages. Where employers did not voluntarily comply, labour inspectors used the enforcement provisions in the Code and recovered almost \$800,000 of the remaining unpaid wages for Canadian workers.

In the context of increased competition in the production of goods and services in a globalized economy, the effective enforcement of labour laws internationally is vital to ensuring Canada's competitive position. We are proud of what we've accomplished in Canada and we have an obligation to help out internationally. The Labour Program is providing technical assistance to partners in the Americas to help strengthen their administration of labour laws.

Our international commitment is reflected in Canada's ongoing active role in the International Labour Organization. And it is what guides our efforts under the international labour agreements we have concluded with Mexico and the United States, Chili and Costa Rica. We are currently working to finalize agreements with Korea and Singapore and we'll be pursuing similar agreements with other trading partners in the Americas.

I have highlighted for you Canada's efforts, through providing mediation and conciliation services, legislation and modern enforcement, in building a quality workplace.

We're working hard at getting it right because good labour laws mean safe and healthy work conditions and modern enforcement means fewer injuries at work and less absenteeism. Labour laws based on consensus mean fewer disputes and work stoppages. People can take pride in their workplace, be more creative and innovative.

All of this is done with a simple objective: enhancement of our quality of life in and outside of work, both on the social and economic fronts.

As always, I am pleased to work with the committee to meet the challenges of the dynamic, ever-changing workplace. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

● (1600)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Blackburn.

I thought I was paying attention there. I thought you added some additional work for us about maybe looking at some additional legislation as well as reviewing the Employment Equity Act. I don't know if we want to thank you for that or not, as we move forward.

We're a pretty busy committee. We have about three pieces of private members' bills before us as well as a couple of studies and another study on disability, so I'm sure this committee will look forward to the additional work we're going to be partaking in over the next few months.

Thank you once again for being here.

We're going to try to get in three rounds today. We're going to start with the opposition Liberals. Ms. Dhalla and Mr. Savage are going to split their time. Mr. Savage has informed me that he wants to make sure that Ruby is only three and a half minutes, so I'll let her go that way and we'll go from there.

Ms. Dhalla, you have three and a half out of seven minutes.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): I hope the minister is going to cooperate and keep his answers short.

I want to begin by thanking both of the ministers for appearing before the committee along with their officials.

I want to get into questioning. As the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, you spoke about the importance of putting a human face on stories. In my question I'm going to put a human face on perhaps a struggle and a challenge that so many Canadian families have come to me with.

I'm sure as a minister you are aware that about 75% of Canadian parents in this country have their children in some form of child care. In talking to many of these Canadian families, you mentioned that they were encouraged. I can tell you, from the picture I have seen and the words I have heard, that this is certainly not the case. They are upset, they are frustrated, and they feel like they have been left scrambling.

You may ask, why is that? They are upset and frustrated because of the fact that they were counting on Stephen Harper and the Conservatives to keep the promise to create 125,000 child care spaces. They were hoping that you would keep your promise to invest in early learning and child care. Instead, they feel that the Conservative government, and you as the minister who took over the portfolio, have really failed those Canadian families and kids. They were so upset that many of these organizations, and one of the largest child care advocacy organizations in the country, were compelled to issue a report card. I'm sure that Stephen Harper brought forward this report card, as would anyone who had received a report card, to the cabinet table to tell you of the outrage that Canadian parents and families feel.

Looking at the report card, I hope no child ever takes home a report like this. There was an F for universal child care; a D-minus on parent choice; an F on balancing work and family; and an F on honouring agreements, where it says that Stephen Harper doesn't play well with others.

On behalf of all of these Canadian families and parents who are so upset at the fact that the Conservative government broke its promise, I simply want to ask you....

Before I do, I'm going to read to you what was written in *Hansard*: "We also will be creating 125,000 new spaces at work, at home and in the community."

Do you know when that was said, Minister? In 2006, on April 25. So it's been a year since this statement was made in the House. It's been 15 or 16 months since your Conservative government was elected. How many child care spaces has this Conservative government created?

• (1605)

Hon. Monte Solberg: Thank you very much for that important question. This is an important issue.

I would start by saying that while I appreciate the passion you bring to this, I reject your characterization of our record on this.

The fact is that we have worked very closely with parents across this country—

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: How many spaces, Minister?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I'll get to that.

When we came to power, one of the first commitments that we made was that we would introduce universal child care benefits, so that parents would have choice in child care. We did that within a few months of coming to office—

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Minister, I don't want to cut you off, but the chair is going to cut me off.

How many spaces? Can you give me a number, please?

Hon. Monte Solberg: You packed many accusations into your question, so I think it's important that I address—

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: They weren't accusations. I'm just telling you about a human face on a human story.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Thank you.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: We need to know how many spaces.

Hon. Monte Solberg: So we did that.

Secondly, we worked with the provinces and talked to them about providing support for child care spaces. In the budget we announced \$250 million of new funding on top of the \$850 million that already exists. In the wake of those announcements, many provinces announced in their own provincial budgets that they would be creating spaces. I'll give you an example.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: We've run out of time, Minister, but I can tell by your answer that the answer is absolutely zero, because you haven't given me a number. You've given me some dollar figures, so 16 months later—

Hon. Monte Solberg: Ontario affirmed that they will—

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: —parents have not received a single child care space.

Hon. Monte Solberg: —go ahead with the creation of 15,000 spaces.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: You've actually cut spaces.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Saskatchewan said they would create 500 spaces. In their provincial budgets, many provinces built on the announcement that we made and committed to creating all kinds of child care spaces.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: They have not seen the delivery. The fact of the matter is that parents need to know the truth, because they are feeling the results.

Hon. Monte Solberg: The truth is that your leader said—

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I'm asking you about child care spaces, Minister. There hasn't been a single space created.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Your leader said he would cut support for parents to provide child care.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I was asking you the number of spaces.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Fair enough.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Go ahead.

Hon. Monte Solberg: We should make sure that we tell not just one side of the story. Parents play a very important role in this. We need to recognize that this government has stepped up to the plate and provided them with support. Your leader has said he would withdraw that support.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Minister, I'm asking you for the number of spaces.

Hon. Monte Solberg: I just went through that with you.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: No. You gave me some dollar figures, and some political rhetoric and projections, but—

Hon. Monte Solberg: No, I mentioned that in the wake of—

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: —we want to know an exact answer, because I'm asking on behalf of those Canadian families that are struggling.

Hon. Monte Solberg: In the wake of our announcement with regard to funding the provinces to create child care spaces, many provinces did make specific announcements. Saskatchewan, for instance, has a waiting list of 1,500. They said they would create 500 spaces. Ontario reaffirmed their commitment to create 15,000 spaces. Other provinces made other commitments.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Minister, may I carry on?

The Chair: You can carry on for a minute and a half.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you.

Minister Solberg, how much was the summer career placement program cut this year?

Hon. Monte Solberg: The summer career placement program no longer exists. We have a new program called Canada summer jobs. It has a budget of \$86 million. The previous program had a budget of \$97 million, and the funding for the not-for-profit sector was retained exactly at \$77.3 million.

• (1610)

Mr. Michael Savage: So if the funding for the not-for-profit sector was retained, why in my riding have the Canadian Diabetes Society, the Canadian Celiac Association, the Edward's House for at-risk boys and girls, the Self-Help Connection for mental health, the Dartmouth North Community Centre, the Elizabeth Fry Society, the new Alderney Landing arts groups, and the Downtown Business Commission—all not-for-profits—consistently received grants over the last number of years, but not this year?

Hon. Monte Solberg: That's a great question, and I appreciate the concern.

Remember that the Canada summer jobs program is part of the youth employment strategy. The purpose of these programs is to create opportunities for youth, so that they can go on and be successful in their careers. The focus of this program is to give students the best possible job experience they can get.

Mr. Michael Savage: If it's for students, and you're right, why wasn't that other \$11 million allocated to hire an equal number of students?

Before you answer the question, I want to let you know that the Autism Society of Nova Scotia has received grants in the last number of years. Last year it got 11 positions. This year we applied for 15 positions and they got none; they were shut out. One hundred and fifty children have been using this program for the summer months, and now that program is very likely not going to happen. They always got the grants; they didn't get one this year.

Was your program designed to exclude the Autism Society of Nova Scotia?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Well—

The Chair: Mr. Minister, I want to mention that we are out of time, but I'll let you finish the answer.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Sure, and thank you very much.

First of all, under the old program, thousands of not-for-profits were turned down every year, because there are always more applications than funds to support them.

Let me give you an example. Under our program, the Autism Resource Centre in Moncton will be getting nine summer work experience students. The great thing about this is that they won't just be doing filing. They'll be working with the psychologists and occupational therapists to get real work experience to take into the workforce and help them with their study.

So the point of this is to make sure that they have those skills going forward, not necessarily to help members of Parliament, their ridings, or even, to be honest, not even necessarily to help individual not-for-profits do their work. As worthy as those not-for-profits are, this is about students. That's what this program is designed to do.

Mr. Michael Savage:

The Chair: I'll have to cut you off there, Mr. Savage. Maybe we can pick you up in the second or third round, if you negotiate with your colleagues.

Madame Lavallée, I've got you for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon, ministers.

First I would like to tell you how disappointed I am to see you here together. I do not understand why you did this. Your government has boasted about being transparent and being willing to answer questions. Yet it has become evident in all the committees, and in many ways, how far you will go to hide, including during an information meeting like this one, where we have two ministers in two hours rather than having each one for two hours. There has been discussion about day cares and summer jobs. I want to talk to you about bankruptcies. You can see that this makes no sense.

That being said, I am also disappointed about the paragraph on the Wage Earner Protection Program Act, spoken by the Minister of Labour. I am disappointed but also a bit fed up. This was Bill C-55, that was tabled in the House in May 2005 and that contained two parts. First, it overhauled the Bankruptcy Act, and second, it provided for an assistance program, wage protection for workers in the event that their employers went bankrupt. The bill was not perfect but it was so satisfactory and so counted on that in November 2005—I believe it was the 25th of November—all parties in the House passed it unanimously. This was just before the 2005 election campaign. The bill was also passed quickly in the Senate, through the fast-track procedure.

When your government was elected in January 2006 you said that there were some technical problems that had to be resolved. We said that was fine, that we understood. It took approximately one year to resolve those technical problems, especially with respect to the overhaul of the Bankruptcy Act. To the Minister of Labour, you tabled this bill last December. In fact, you tabled a ways and means motion on the 8th of December last. That was five months ago. Now you're telling us: "I urge the members of your political parties to move forward in reaching consensus on these amendments."

Minister, that is not how one proceeds with a bill. If you want us to discuss your bill, then put it on the table, let's give it consideration, let us vote on it at second reading, refer it to committee, and make the necessary changes. The change that is difficult, at least for the Bloc Québécois but also for other political parties, is the one involving a clause in the Bankruptcy Act that states that RRSPs will be liable to seizure, which runs counter to the Quebec Civil Code, that states that RRSPs are not liable to seizure. Minister, I think that you have to compromise on this point because you stated that the purpose of this is to protect RRSPs, to prevent someone from putting too much money in RRSPs knowing that they will be bankrupt the next day. Your legislation already has a provision stating that you're not allowed to do that. Therefore, an individual's RRSPs would become liable to seizure, if it could be shown—and it's often easy to do this—that this step was taken in order to protect some money during an eventual bankruptcy.

Minister, when are you going to table this bill?

• (1615)

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Madam, we have in fact had several opportunities to discuss this issue. You have also put questions to me on this issue in the House of Commons and I have always answered your questions. Thus, allow me to recall, for those who are listening to us, the circumstances.

During the last Parliament, before we came to the House of Commons, there was a unanimous motion on the part of members of Parliament requesting that this bill be put forward in order to protect the wages of workers in cases where a business—

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: My time, as you know, is limited. I probably only have three minutes left out of the seven that I was given. I have already explained all of this, I gave the background. Now I would like you to answer my question. When will you table this bill in the House? If your answer is that you will never do so, then tell me why and we can move on to something else.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Even if you start over 20 times, Madam, I am still going to say what I have to say. I am telling you that this legislation was voted on in the House of Commons for the purposes of protecting the wages of employees in cases where businesses went bankrupt.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: I said that.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: When we became the government, we had to take on this responsibility that had been unanimously decided on by the House of Commons.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: I also said that.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: That is what we did. We prepared the bill, which consists in technical changes.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: I also said that.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Those changes deal with the Department of Labour and Department of Industry. We also tabled a ways and means motion.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: I said that as well. That was on the 8th of December—

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: There was an agreement amongst all the parties to the effect that this would be tabled at first, second and third reading, through the fast-track procedure, precisely in order to refer the bill to the Senate for the purposes of further consideration, given that the bill consisted of technical changes.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: I'll stop you now.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: That was our agreement.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: No, not at all.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: I realize that you're not happy with that, but that is the agreement we had.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Minister, I have always told you that it made no sense to refer our work to Senate. It made no sense. The Senate makes changes and amendments and then returns it to the House. That makes no sense. I don't know why you think you can use that procedure.

Why do you not follow normal procedure? All the ministers, including your colleague, table bills in the House, and we then consider those bills. Regardless, we all want this bill. That is true. We are correct in saying that we all want it, but we don't want it in any old way and we don't want our work to be done by the Senate.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: The public must know what your amendment is. You would like a business, 10 minutes before it declares bankruptcy, to be able to put \$100,000 in an RRSP and for that money to be protected from seizure, when that money belongs to other individuals.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: That's impossible, Minister.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: And that amendment, you know—

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: This isn't possible.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: You know that the Minister of Industry was very clear—

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: I'm sorry, Minister, but this is my time.

[English]

The Chair: You have one minute left.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: It is impossible for a business to put \$100,000 into an RRSP. First, a business cannot use RRSPs. Furthermore, you can't put \$100,000 into an RRSP. There is a limit that I am not particularly familiar with, but it's somewhere between \$10,000 and \$20,000. So that is false on two counts. Why won't you table your bill in the House? We can follow normal procedure. If you had done this on December 8, it would have been changed, amended and passed.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: If you had kept your word, the bill would already be in the Senate for consideration. There is nothing preventing the Senate from considering amendments that you put forward and determining whether they are appropriate or not. If the Senate decides that your amendments are in order, then it will probably refer them to the House of Commons and the Parliament can then decide. You don't want to do this, you are blocking this bill on purpose because you insist on—

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: No, I am very, very sorry.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: —when—

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: On the contrary, I persist on asking you to table it.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: —the bill reflects the unanimous will of the House of Commons.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: No. Two points. First—

[English]

The Chair: That's all the time we have right now, Madame Lavallée.

I would point out that it was the committee that gave the invitation for both of you to attend together. We have a very fulsome agenda. I realize you didn't request to be here together; it was an invitation by the committee. I wanted to state that for the record, because I know you haven't been to some of our meetings. We welcome you back, but you haven't been here for a little while.

Mr. Martin, seven minutes, sir.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Thank you very much.

Thanks for coming, Minister Solberg and Minister Blackburn. We appreciate this opportunity to talk with you about issues of great concern to us and the people we represent.

You noted, Minister Solberg, that you've travelled the country over the last while to see firsthand how your department touches the lives of Canadians. I commend you for that.

I've also travelled the country over the last nine months, looking at the question of poverty. I have seen some things that were alarming and quite troubling, particularly in this land of plenty. We have great prosperity—nobody will argue with that—but on the other hand we have people who aren't participating.

We obviously have some differences of opinion on what programs are working and on approaches to actually resolving that kind of thing. In its wisdom this committee has agreed to actually have some hearings in the fall on the issue of the prosperity gap and poverty to

see if we can't, in a non-partisan way, come up with some real solutions to some real issues out there.

Studies have indicated that the average income gap is \$125,000 a year between the richest 20% and the poorest 20%. That's too much. There are 650,000 working poor. We can debate the definitions of poverty until we're blue in the face, but I think the opportunity in these hearings is to break through that to determine, by way of poverty indicators, basic rights, necessities for all Canadians, recommendations for a national plan.

This is something I spoke of in the House and that you actually listened to recently and responded to. We didn't agree at that time that we should actually have a national anti-poverty strategy. Perhaps these hearings will get us to a point where we agree that there are some things we might be able to do together.

I'm suggesting that we look at other jurisdictions in Canada. Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec have laws and programs to reduce poverty, as do countries such as Britain and Ireland. For example, Ireland has reduced its poverty from 16% to 5% over the last ten years.

What I'm looking for is your ministry's approach to that. Would you support that initiative? I would like your thoughts on it.

• (1620)

Hon. Monte Solberg: First of all, let me say thank you for your commitment on this issue. We have talked about this before, and I appreciate the good will in wanting to approach this in a non-partisan way. I do support this. We've had this discussion in the past.

I was recently in Calgary. We have a huge homelessness issue with people coming to look for work only to find that they can't find a place to live. We have all kinds of challenges. I would recommend that the committee take this up in a serious way and look at the big picture.

You've been working on an employability study. I think it's appropriate to take some of the conclusions and build on that. Frankly, I think you should look at the role of markets in helping to alleviate poverty. Obviously we also have to look at ways in which government can help directly and do more than we're doing. I think those are all laudable ideas. I think we should look at other jurisdictions. Why make the same mistakes others have made when there's already a pathway provided by the experience of other jurisdictions?

Mr. Tony Martin: Some of the new announcements in your budget, however well intentioned, really aren't hitting the mark—for example, the program to supplement the working poor. I don't know if you're aware, but an analysis has been done of that, and a family with two people working full-time and making minimum wage actually makes too much money. They're making minimum wage. It has been determined that you can't really look after yourself at \$8 an hour, even with two people working, because of the costs for child care and other needs. They don't qualify for any of that money. A single person working full-time on minimum wage is not making enough to hit that target either. You have two huge groups of people in our country who will not benefit, by one cent, from that program.

•(1625)

Hon. Monte Solberg: If I can just respond to that, the point of the WITB, the working income tax benefit, is to reduce the effective tax rate that people face as their incomes increase and the benefits they receive decrease so that there is an incentive to continue to work and earn more and stay attached to the workforce.

Now, I admit that these programs are always imperfect. There will always be examples of people who don't benefit as much as they can. But I don't think that's an argument about principle. It may be an argument about tinkering with how it's done. Officials always review these things to make sure they're done correctly.

I take your point. I think we can debate whether it actually achieves that goal, but it will certainly help thousands and thousands of people.

Mr. Tony Martin: A number of studies have been done, Minister, over the last year or two to look at this growing concern of the working poor—people working full-time on minimum wage. In fact, the numbers were crunched. We thought your government was going to respond to that because you want to support people who are working. There are literally thousands and thousands of people out there now, and more every day across the country, who can only get a minimum-wage job. And they're working full-time at it. I don't think anybody would disagree that if you're working full-time you shouldn't be living in poverty—and they are.

This new program is missing the mark in two instances. A couple who is working full-time and making minimum wage will make too much money to get any money from that program, and a single person working full-time at minimum wage won't either. So I will leave that for you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin. That's all the time you have. We'll have to catch you on the next round.

Mr. Tony Martin: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Now we're going to move to the last MP questioner of this round. We have Ms. Yelich.

I believe you're going to be splitting your time, but you have seven minutes.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Yes. I believe it's with Mr. Chong and then Patrick.

I'm just going to make a comment and then I'm going to allow the questions to be asked.

In that the Liberal critic likes to bring up politics, I would like to mention that in the last election, the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, and our party did make a commitment. We had a platform and we made a commitment to introduce a family support policy that gives parents two choices in child care. We listed off universal child care, as the minister spoke about, continuing tax benefits and deductions for low-income people, and we helped employers create child care spaces.

I find it very interesting that she holds everyone to such a high standard when her own party doesn't have a very good record. The Liberal deputy leader at the time, Sheila Copps, said the last Liberal agreement saw some provinces raking in millions without creating a day care space. Yet our party has. We have commitments for Ontario,

Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia. I want to assure the member that with respect to child care spaces, we have a commitment to Canadians and we have fulfilled it. I think we're doing a very good job.

The Chair: Mr. Chong.

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

When I directed my questions to the minister on Friday last week, Statistics Canada released the latest labour force survey, and it showed that Canada's unemployment rate remained at an historic 33-year low in April. Not only that, but when that labour force survey was adjusted for comparability with the United States definitions, employment growth for the first four months of the year was stronger in Canada than south of the border.

In light of this tight job market, the tight labour market, liberal mobility among Canadians is becoming an increasing concern for many people. So my question is specifically for the minister or for the deputy minister of HRSD. I note that one of the program activities you have is the workplace skills program. It includes a number of programs, one of which is the apprenticeship and labour mobility initiative, which has a mandate to work with provinces on labour mobility issues, including recognizing credentials and licences issued by various provinces so we can remove these barriers in labour mobility issues and so we can address them, I understand, by April 1, 2009.

Can you provide this committee with an update or an idea of the status of this program activity?

•(1630)

Hon. Monte Solberg: Sure.

Thank you very much for the question. It's an important question, because if we can make progress on this, it will mean that people who today are locked into certain provinces because their credentials aren't recognized will be able to move freely and work and see their wages rise.

And you're right, we're in a very hot labour market, but because of those inefficiencies, sometimes we can't fill jobs on the one hand, and people who have skills and abilities unfortunately can't use them to the degree they could. So we lose out, and it's probably something worthy of a discussion by this committee.

We are doing a number of things. First of all, under Minister Bernier's and Minister Flaherty's leadership, discussions are going on with the provinces with respect to labour mobility. Our department is also taking steps. One of the things we announced in the budget is new labour market agreements with the provinces, which will ensure we provide them with \$500 million a year in new funding to help them reach people who don't have access to employment insurance and create programs that will allow those people to succeed.

We will also be talking to the provinces at the same time about the need for them to work with us to drop these barriers so when people get these skills and abilities they can move more freely around the country and realize their life goals and become successful. I think it's our obligation as parliamentarians to work toward that.

So there are a number of different initiatives under way.

Hon. Michael Chong: I'm going to share my time with Patrick Brown.

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Okay, thank you. I think this is a first: we're sharing it three times.

I have two questions on seniors I wanted to ask the minister. I know there have been some great benefits for seniors in the most recent budget on two fronts with the tax fairness plan. Could you expand a little about the billion dollars in tax savings for seniors through the age credit and the pension income splitting? But also, I was at a senior citizens home in my riding, the IOF. They recently received a New Horizons grant and they were showing me some amazing things they're doing there with seniors with the support of the Government of Canada, so maybe you could talk about the new funding that's available for the New Horizons program for seniors as well.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Thank you. Those are important questions.

Obviously, more and more of us are becoming seniors. The baby-boom generation is moving into its senior years, and I think it's really important that we not only start to orient programming toward making sure that seniors are well looked after, but also that we have good input from seniors. So we've launched a couple of initiatives with respect to that. First of all, the Prime Minister has appointed a secretary of state for seniors, the Honourable Marjory LeBreton. Although I'm pretty biased, I'd say she's doing a terrific job at this and is very aggressive in going out and seeking input from seniors. We've appointed a seniors council. We've also appointed a panel on older workers that is chaired by a former senator, Erminie Cohen. Their job is to go around and study the impact of job loss on older workers and find ways to engage and get them into the workforce.

But to your question, pension splitting is extraordinarily important and helpful to Canadian seniors. This was a very important step the finance minister took and will mean that so many more seniors will be able to live in some degree of comfort in their senior years. That combined with the improvements on the age credit means a pretty big step forward in terms of take-home pay for Canadian seniors. I think that's laudable, and I think we all support that.

The Chair: You have fifteen seconds.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Fifteen seconds? Okay.

I know there have been significant resources put into child care spaces. The Liberal premier in Ontario was given \$97.5 million, but for some reason he only invested \$25 million. Have you had any talks to convince the Liberals that child care is important and that we shouldn't abandon it?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Well, I appreciate that. I've discovered that I have 55 provincial counterparts in my new job now.

I actually do talk to the provincial ministers, and I have talked to Minister Chambers. Along with the new transfer to the provinces for

child care, which escalates at 3% a year, by the way, and is a new feature, we will be talking to them about how this money will be spent and about accountability measures. That's part of the discussion we're having right now.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brown.

We're now going to move to our second round, which is five minutes. We have Mr. Silva and Mr. Merasty who are sharing their time.

● (1635)

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ministers, thank you for your presence. I'll try to make my questions very short, so please make your answers very short. I am limited by time.

Minister Blackburn, although there has been much discussion in the House and in the media about your excessive expenses and travel expenses, that is not going to be the focus of my questions.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mario Silva: I do want to question you on two very important pieces of legislation. The first is the wage protection program, Bill C-55, which we passed in the House when the Liberals were in power. It is a very important piece of legislation. It protects workers from companies that are going bankrupt. To this date we have seen no action on this file. You also have a report before you, the part III report, the Arthurs report, which also looks at how to benefit workers in this country.

To date we have not seen any action from you and your ministry on these very important pieces of legislation. What are you planning to do to help working families and workers across the country?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Sir, you made some very pertinent observations. In fact, our government wants to be prompt in responding to the expectations of employees who want to be protected in case their employer goes bankrupt. We know that Bill C-55 would award four weeks of salary, up to a maximum of \$3,000.

Unfortunately, just as the parties were reaching an agreement, the Bloc Québécois backed out. At the same time, it proposed two amendments. This stopped us from making any progress, despite many attempts and much discussion between both parties. The Bloc Québécois is sticking to its position. However, we cannot accept their proposal.

We do not think that it is fair to allow an employer to invest several thousand dollars in his RRSP just a few minutes or a few hours before declaring bankruptcy. Now this is an amendment, and the others would like those funds to be liable to seizure. We are of the opposite view.

However, if the parties reach an agreement tomorrow morning, the bill could go through the first, second and third readings in the same day. It would then be sent to the Senate for an exhaustive, in-depth study, because it involves technical changes.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Minister, you have the full right and responsibility, as a government minister, to table this bill. If it is important for all Canadian workers, it is your obligation to table this bill, even if there is no consensus among the opposition members.

Frankly, I do not understand why you did not table this bill before the House.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: On the contrary, we gave a notice of motion, and subsequently consulted the three parties. They agreed to go ahead with our proposal, but later, they changed their minds. Apparently, the Bloc Québécois has an opinion about the Senate, they think that senators cannot do anything of value.

I am sorry, but we each have a role in the Canadian system. We have a government, a House of Commons and a Senate. The Senate can make recommendations and send the bill back to the House of Commons. If the recommendations are well founded, the House of Commons will certainly deal with them.

[English]

Mr. Mario Silva: I'll be very brief.

On the issue of temporary foreign workers, I've spoken to the minister about the fact that we have a situation in the construction industry where there's a lack of workers. The average age is 55. We're not getting workers to this country who meet those demands. Yet the temporary foreign workers program you put in place excludes construction workers from actually getting into Canada to fill those important positions.

Hon. Monte Solberg: I'm not sure I understood your question. The temporary foreign worker program does allow construction workers to come into the country. In fact we've made a number of recent improvements to make it better for employers, including allowing workers to stay for up to two years under the work permit.

We are trying to respond to this as best we can. In some sectors there really are shortages that make it very difficult for people who are doing building to get the job done on time. Ironically, it is putting in jeopardy other jobs. So we are taking a number of steps. We've put in place a number of new measures just in the last year.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Merasty, you have 35 seconds.

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): Well, I guess I'll make a statement specific to aboriginal issues. The AHRDA agreements, the aboriginal human resource agreements, are frozen. There's no escalator funding. The population is booming. There is no provision to actually capitalize on this emerging population. The aboriginal skills and employment partnership is inadequate, in that it will, if you stick to their criteria, not actually move the money out.

The second point is on the child care issue. There are 7,000 child care spaces right now for aboriginal children. There are 86,000, projected to go to 106,000 over the next 10 years. The plan, the \$100 a month and then the tax credit, does not work. So we're ending up with the aboriginal people being much like that mural on the wall of the guys with the map. The aboriginal guy seems to know where he's going, but he's kept on the outside and from actually guiding them

properly. So it's unfortunate that this is the situation we find ourselves in when it comes to the labour force and child care.

I know there's no time to respond—

• (1640)

The Chair: Do you want a quick response?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Very quickly, the universal child care benefit, I would argue, is very valuable to natives on reserve, and certainly we've made a commitment to never remove it, but your leader has said that he would take it away.

Mr. Gary Merasty: They all get it.

Hon. Monte Solberg: And second, with respect to ASEP, we are doubling the aboriginal skills employment program because it works so well. And it's encouraging to see more and more aboriginals joining the workforce, because it's a program that marries them with companies that are prepared to work hard to get to know aboriginals in different parts of the country and bring them into the workforce. It's very successful, and I'm pretty optimistic about it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Merasty and Mr. Solberg.

We're now going to move to the Bloc and Mr. Lessard, for seven minutes.

[Translation]

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

Sir, I deplore the fact that you, as the Minister of Labour, are taking advantage of the situation to spread disinformation regarding the positions of the political parties.

The role of this committee and of all the other committees consists in advising the House of Commons. Therefore, we must come up with answers that are as brief and, of course, as accurate as possible.

I was also hoping to get an answer regarding the number of child care centres created by your government. Mr. Minister, you spoke of 15,000 spaces. Just recently, the committee heard witnesses from Ontario, who told us about the successful creation of spaces in child care centres through a long-term program in that province. Ontario, and specifically the Toronto region, is where the most spaces in child care centres have been created. And this has nothing to do with the Conservative Party's strategy.

I think that I still have the same question: How many spaces in child care centres have you created?

However, there is another issue about which I insist on getting answers from the ministers, especially from Mr. Solberg. I am talking about the Summer Career Placements Program. Although you changed the name, it is still the same program. You changed the venues for the choices: they would be made by non-profit organizations in each provincial capital and by private organizations in Ottawa. Thus, the people on the ground in each riding no longer know what is happening, who made the requests and who got what. Mr. Minister, although your government says that it wants more transparency, this file says otherwise.

Do the choices have to be made today? Have they been made, Mr. Minister? Will you send the list of the organizations to which you awarded positions, along with their number, to this committee, if not to each riding? This would enable us to compare with what was done last year and see whether you were right in saying that you would save money. Above all, we want to see how effective your actions have been.

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg: Mr. Chairman, the summer career placements program is gone. The new Canada summer jobs program is in place. And the new program is not about members of Parliament. It's not about their ridings. It's about ensuring that students get the best possible job opportunities.

The organizations that ultimately receive the funding—that information will be made public very soon.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Between us, are you going to send this information, namely the list of all those who received subsidies, to this committee and to the ridings?

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg: Mr. Lessard, the information will not be handed out on the basis of ridings because we don't make the decision on the basis of ridings. We will be handing out the information in the form of a list of the groups that have been funded.

But this is not like the old program. Remember that this department is responsible for administering something like 74,000 grants and contributions a year. The only program I'm aware of where members of Parliament play a role in deciding—

•(1645)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Minister, you are going to tell us what we already know.

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg: —how the money is spent—

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: You said that it would not be done for each riding. Can you simply tell me how it will be done, if it is not done for each riding?

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg: Sure. The criteria are public, and I would refer you to the web.

Let me just break it down. There are a number of criteria—

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Is it already on the website, Mr. Minister? Can we find out all the names today?

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg: All the information is available on the website, Mr. Lessard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: All right, Mr. Minister.

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg: I could provide you with the—

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Do you have that for each riding?

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg: No, the decisions are not made on a riding-by-riding basis. Essentially they're made on three big criteria. One is to create jobs that otherwise would not be created. Secondly—

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: We are aware of the criteria, Mr. Minister. I simply want to know how this is being done. You said that it would not be done for each riding, but rather for all ridings in general. The 2007-2008 budget proposes \$55 million in cuts from a \$97.5-million budget. Ten million dollars were cut this year.

Are you still intending to cut a further \$45 million next year?

[English]

The Chair: Do you want to answer that question? Mr. Lessard is out of time.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Sure.

The answer is no. The program is funded this year at \$87 million. The program will be funded at a comparable level.

But I want to say this program is designed to benefit students. I think what's happened, Mr. Chairman, is that a number of members of Parliament are looking at this the wrong way. I think they're looking at it as a way for them to exercise influence in their ridings and in some cases help out very worthy groups. But my job is to make sure we have a labour force—

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chairman, he is not answering my question.

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg: —ready to go forward and be successful in the world, when we have a very difficult challenge facing us because of global competition for talent.

That's why we're designing this program the way we are. We want to make sure we don't revert to—

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chairman, I do not want to hear propaganda, I want to hear facts.

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg: —a system that allows MPs to unduly influence—

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chairman, I want to hear the facts. Will the cuts be made next year according to plan? Mr. Chairman, I am not getting an answer.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's all the time we have.

We're going to move on to Mr. Martin. Five minutes, sir.

Mr. Tony Martin: I have about three questions for Minister Solberg.

I do want to say, right off the top, that I'm somewhat offended by your response to this question about the summer grants. I don't think you can paint all politicians in the same way on this one. I think it's unfair that you characterize it as you do.

Since I've come here, I've met many politicians of different stripes. We're all here trying to do the right thing for our constituents, and there's nothing wrong with that. That's the reason we're elected.

For us to want to make sure we get our fair share of the money that's coming for career student placement—

Hon. Monte Solberg: It's not your money. It's not your fair share. It's for the students.

Mr. Tony Martin: But it's also to be spread across the country. And if we find out that most of this money is going to particular ridings or particular areas...

We had a discussion at this table in the last Parliament. We brought forward a report to the government to say that we wanted to look at other criteria. Everybody around the table, all of us, Liberal, Conservative, New Democrat, and the Bloc, agreed that there needed to be clear criteria, nationally recognized and respected.

Hon. Monte Solberg: And there are.

Mr. Tony Martin: But we can't get that from you. So I'm asking—

Hon. Monte Solberg: Oh, yes. I can provide it right now. It's right here in front of me.

Mr. Tony Martin: My first request of you this afternoon is to table with this committee the... We've read there are 12 criteria and a point system, and that there's a grid and point system. We'd like you to table with the committee that grid and point system so we can all see it for ourselves and understand why it is that some of us got more and some of us got less and why some very well-meaning, hard-working organizations got money and others didn't.

That's always the challenge for us. Whether you like it or not, we're going to get the questions. We're going to take the heat. They'll be asking us why they didn't get funded this year and why they got funded last year. And we have to answer those questions, not you.

• (1650)

Hon. Monte Solberg: Well, I can assure you I'm answering questions right now, I think.

Mr. Tony Martin: You are, and we appreciate that.

My second thing is that I notice there are reductions of \$20 million and \$35 million respectively for the Canada learning bond and the Canada education savings grant. In the case of the Canada learning bond, which is for low-income families, that's a 44% cut. I have three questions.

Previously these programs were projected to increase every year as we had more uptake by parents making use of these programs. Do you have any explanation for the reductions? Has the decline in uptake been so remarkable that these programs, specifically the one for low-income families, are on the decrease instead of the increase?

My second question on this front is that we know that the Canada education savings grant goes disproportionately to wealthier families. I'm sure you have some statistics as a way of keeping track of this, to be sure that these programs are efficiently going to those who need it most. Can you provide the committee with any research you have on this?

And third, and more of a rationale question, the summer career placement program was cut because some people were receiving money who would have otherwise found a job, while the CESG is designed specifically to give money to well-off families who are otherwise able to save for their kids.

Those are my questions for the moment.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Thank you.

There are a number of issues in there. I'll just try to address specifically the Canada learning bond.

The Chair: You have a minute left.

Hon. Monte Solberg: The forecast for the Canada learning bond is \$25 million, and it's \$540 million for the Canada education savings grant.

I'll tell you that I've talked to the officials about this in the past, and the concern that we have is that there's not as big a take-up on this as we would like. One of the things we've talked about is finding ways to attract more attention to these programs, Mr. Chairman, because we do see these programs as ways that people can provide for their children and for university down the road, post-secondary education. But there are no cuts. This is a problem with the take-up rate, and we're concerned about it, just as concerned as the member is.

With respect to Canada summer jobs, I just want to point out that I'm not suggesting that there's mal-intent on behalf of all members of Parliament with regard to these things. But I want to point out that, for instance, in one province last year there were 880 jobs handed out, jobs that had a grant for three weeks, many of them to fast food outlets, which we understand sometimes provide some important learning opportunities for people, but I don't think we're making the best use of this program. This program is designed to help students get the best possible experience they can get. So we're orienting more of this to applicants who have made it clear in their application that they will give students a quality work experience that they'll parlay into success in their career.

I appreciate again your concern with respect to how I've characterized this, but I think we have failed students sadly for many years because of how this program was designed. Now, I appreciate you'll get many questions on it, but the people who aren't questioning it are students who are getting tremendous work experience through the new program.

The Chair: Okay. That's all the time we have. I hope the minister doesn't have any problem with fast food restaurants. I'm very concerned about that.

Hon. Monte Solberg: No. I should apologize to anyone, Mr. Chairman, who's involved in that.

The Chair: We want to thank Mr. Martin on that.

We're going to now move to the final questioner of the second round. Five minutes, Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): I'll start by saying that after listening to the earlier exchange between Ms. Lavallée and Minister Blackburn, I want to take a moment to recognize the considerable skills of our interpreter in keeping up, because that was a pretty fast-paced conversation and it was pretty amazing to actually hear the interpretation.

Minister Solberg, I just want to talk a little bit. As you know, I have an 11-year-old son with autism, Jaden, and like all parents, one of the things that my wife and I think a lot about is our kids' future. Obviously with Jaden there are many additional things on our mind, both hopes that we have for him and some challenges that we face. I think one of the challenges that concerns parents of kids with all forms of disability is how will they do as an adult when they are older and when we are older and maybe no longer able to care for them. I'm very encouraged with many of the steps actually in the budget to do with helping families dealing with disabilities. In particular, I want to just ask if you could give a little bit more information regarding the registered disability savings plan.

• (1655)

Hon. Monte Solberg: Thank you for that.

I'm encouraged by this program as well. I think it recognizes that many parents are concerned for the well-being of their children. As parents age, they want to know there's a way to provide for them. The disability savings plan is designed to not only allow parents to contribute, but other family members or loved ones as well, so that as parents age they know their child will be looked after. We've received a tremendous amount of good comment regarding this.

The plan is to put \$140 million into this over the next two years. I don't know that there's any limit on the amount of money that can be put into the program on behalf of parents. Again, I think it recognizes not just parents, but all those who want to contribute. We want to make sure that they ultimately have the means to be looked after. It recognizes the compassion we all have, as a society, for people who are disabled.

Mr. Mike Lake: I want to give you an opportunity to comment on the working income tax benefit. I know that Mr. Martin was asking you a few questions and you had started to make some comments about it. What I'd like to hear is how this is going to help low-income Canadians and their families. I know there are a great many people who are going to be helped by this initiative.

Hon. Monte Solberg: This is a longstanding problem in Canada. We have a lot of different programs that are meant to address poverty in this country, but as people's incomes rise these programs are clawed back. There gets to be a point in a person's income where you're seeing a clawback of up to 80¢ on the dollar for people who are working and trying to improve their lives. This is obviously something that really does affect a person's behaviour. We know that incentives matter in economics. The working income tax benefit is designed to lower that effective clawback, the high tax margin for people earning as little as \$30,000.

Minister Flaherty put this in place, along with another element that will help the disabled community. Again, we want to make sure that we take advantage of the extraordinarily hot labour markets and help disabled Canadians get into the workforce in much bigger numbers. They have very high levels of unemployment, but they have great potential and skills. We need to make sure they are rewarded and that their benefits aren't all clawed back, making it unattractive for them to stay attached in the workforce.

Mr. Mike Lake: I have one quick question for Minister Blackburn.

In your opening statement you touched a bit on the Non-smokers' Health Act and some steps that you took today. That's the first I've heard about it. Could you comment on specifically what that means?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Your government's decision regarding this matter was announced in public a few hours ago. As the Minister of Labour, I am in charge of health and safety at work. There is also legislation regarding the health of non-smokers.

Over the years, our department has worked to ensure that there be no second-hand smoke, to protect non-smokers in federal buildings equipped with smoking rooms. A few months ago, I became interested in the presence of second-hand smoke outside the smoking rooms. Some people told me that it was present.

To begin with, we checked 11 smoking rooms at random. Only one of them did not have adequate ventilation, and it was closed down. There was no second-hand smoke outside the 10 remaining smoking rooms. However, we wanted to go further. We checked 12 more smoking rooms and the results were the same, there was no second-hand smoke outside. Therefore, our Non-smokers' Health Act was adequate and companies were enforcing it properly.

I went even further to find out what happens in smoking rooms before people go to work in the morning and when they are full of employees who smoke during their break. I wanted to find out about the air quality. This led to very surprising results.

In the morning, before the employees went into the smoking room, there were 27 times more fine particles than in the adjoining room. When people went to smoke during their breaks, there was 245 times more fine particles in the smoking room than in the room next to it. Thus, to follow a good principle, we protected non-smokers by putting the smokers in one room, without any regard to what happened in there.

Let me give you an idea of what 245 times more fine particles represent. The air in that smoking room is six times worse than the air on the worst day of smog or pollution in Montreal or Toronto in the summer time. At that point, we had to make a decision, and we thought that the best thing to do was to change our regulations and close down the smoking rooms.

We are asking employers not to wait for the regulations to change, because it will take a few months. Because of the high particle rates that we discovered, they can go ahead right away.

The statistics showed that we had to intervene. The fine particles of second-hand smoke contain 4,000 chemical products, 50 of which are carcinogenic.

• (1700)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blackburn.

We're now going to move to our third and final round. We have the Liberals for five minutes and the Conservatives for five minutes.

Ms. Dhalla and Mr. Savage are going to share their time. I think they're going to switch it around this time.

Mr. Michael Savage: Yes, I'll go first, but please stop me at two minutes. I don't want to intrude.

Minister Solberg, last year the government announced a \$55 million cut to the summer career placement program. We saw an \$11 million cut this year. Are you now saying the \$55 million cut has been reversed?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I'm saying that the \$55 million cut never took place. I guess the budget is \$85.9 million. The budget last year was \$97 million. The only thing that changed was the support for the private sector and public sector, which was a very small amount.

Mr. Michael Savage: Yes, we got all that. This is a change in government policy from the cuts that were announced in the fall.

Hon. Monte Solberg: As a new minister, I thought I had some latitude to make those changes.

Mr. Michael Savage: Okay. You correctly told us this program is first and foremost for students. You have also correctly told us that every year not-for-profit applications for students exceeded the number of students.

My question is this. If you cut \$11 million out of large corporations, why wouldn't you reallocate it to the students who need the jobs and the not-for-profits who are out there applying for them?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Well, I guess you could have asked that of your own government when you were in power.

Mr. Michael Savage: We didn't cut the program.

Hon. Monte Solberg: I think the key here is that we have the hottest labour markets today that we've had in 40 years.

It's funny. I was looking through some of the numbers. I noticed they have an unemployment rate of 3.9% in Fredericton, which rivals Alberta.

There are many more opportunities today for students than there have been in many years. I think we should all celebrate.

Mr. Michael Savage: We all celebrate the good work of the Liberal government that brought that about. But there are still students who need jobs. Do you not think that's the case? Do you think there are enough students to fill those jobs?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Actually, in some areas there are spots where students need jobs, which is why we changed the program so more funding can go to the areas of highest need.

Mr. Michael Savage: I would suggest that the students who need the jobs aren't going to get them.

In response to my question about the Autism Society of Nova Scotia, you referenced a Moncton group. I'm not sure if you're aware that Moncton and Dartmouth are in different provinces.

Since you mentioned New Brunswick, my colleague Paul Zed put out a press release, because he's been hearing the same thing I have. In his community, the YM-YWCA was denied funding, as were the Boys and Girls Club of Saint John, Saint John Arts Centre, the Canadian Cancer Society, the teen resource centre, and Turnbull Nursing Home.

All across the country, MPs and Service Canada are hearing from people who are asking why, in a time of plenty, in a time of massive surpluses, you would cut jobs to students. I think it's a good question. I think it's a disgrace.

I will now give my time to Ruby Dhalla.

How did I do?

The Chair: You're at 2:20, so you've left Ms. Dhalla—

Hon. Monte Solberg: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to answer that.

I think—

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Sorry, we have two and a half minutes left.

Hon. Monte Solberg: He's asked me a question.

The Chair: I'll make sure that you have your two and a half minutes.

Go ahead.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Mr. Chairman, we have an obligation to provide the best possible jobs for students, and simply rhyming off the names of different groups that didn't receive funding isn't very instructive. We could go back to years past and do exactly the same thing under the previous government.

What's important is what jobs are being offered, what barriers there are for students in those areas, and what the unemployment rate is in those areas relative to other parts of the province. The member has not provided any of that.

Mr. Chairman, my job is to make sure that these students are prepared to tackle the world. That means that this program has to give them the tools to do the job, not just to pour coffee, with great respect to my colleague, but it's to find the best possible jobs for them so they can succeed.

• (1705)

Mr. Michael Savage: You cut the program.

The Chair: Ms. Dhalla, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: The bottom line, Minister, with all due respect, is that students are simply out of jobs, and the program has been cut.

I just wanted to address, before I ask my question.... The member opposite, Ms. Yelich, had stated that I was going on about child care spaces. The reason I continue to ask about child care spaces is because it's an important issue to so many Canadian parents and families.

Minister Solberg, when I asked you how many spaces were created, I appreciated your answer, but you weren't able to give me an exact number. You were able to provide me with projections. But way back in 2005 and 2006 you also projected that you would create 125,000 spaces, and a year and a half later the number is still zero.

I'm going to go on to Minister Blackburn for a second, because I know that the chair is going to cut me off. I'm sure the minister is eager to tell this committee a bit about his expenses. I don't think we've had an opportunity to address that today.

Minister Blackburn, I want to bring up a quote that was stated by your House leader, Mr. Van Loan, when he stated, and I quote, "The fact is, the expenses of the Conservative labour minister"—

The Chair: I'm going to rule that question out of order. We're here to talk about the estimates.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I was actually going to ask him about the estimates, because I think the government has spoken about accountability and transparency, and many Canadians want to know the answer in regard to accountability and transparency with regard to the minister's expenses.

The Chair: Once again, I'm going to rule that out of order.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I'll be more than happy to ask questions on child care, then, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Okay, there you go. Thank you.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Can we have a vote to overrule the chair?

The Chair: Actually, that's five minutes. Your time is up. We're going to move on to the next person.

This is the last round of five minutes.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I just want to make a comment, because there are some good things happening. I know that in Saskatoon, for example—this is to Minister Solberg—there is a pilot project that SIAST is doing, taking it abroad, to recognize foreign credentials. I think that's excellent. The e-learning that was just launched here in Ottawa is great. You're doing lots for skills and training.

Mr. Merasty mentioned his people. He serves the northern part of Saskatchewan, and mining is really important. I know that in Canada, mining is a \$39.7 billion industry. So what are you doing to attract and retain workers in the mining industry? Because for sure, this would address Mr. Merasty's concerns about some of the north.

Hon. Monte Solberg: First of all, going back to the aboriginal skills and employment partnership, that program is actually used quite heavily by the mining sector. I can think of what's going on at Voisey's Bay, where the aboriginal community makes up 50% of the workforce, and I'm encouraged.

There was a great story in *The Globe and Mail* in the fall regarding the rising number of aboriginals in the workforce today. And the aboriginal skills and employment program, although it is expensive in a sense—it costs about \$10,000 a person to run training for that person—has tremendous results. So I'm pretty darned encouraged by that.

I think the fact that we have hot labour markets allows us to begin to resolve some of the long-standing social problems we've had in this country and to at least make progress on them with respect to

people who have not been attached to the workforce in the past—people who are disabled, people who are already working, in some cases, but don't have the skills to advance.

These new labour market agreements we've put in place—the aboriginal skills and employment program that we've doubled the funding for and a number of other initiatives we're taking, including changes to labour market development agreements and this kind of thing—all give us the ability to tap that hot labour market and make sure that people who've never really been involved and engaged in getting the help they need can finally get that help.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Brown, you have about two minutes and 45 seconds.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Thank you, Mr. Allison.

I have two quick questions for Minister Solberg. First, I understand there's been an increase of 40% in post-secondary education transfers under the CST. Maybe you could touch a little on that recognition of the importance of education.

Second, I've heard some talk about the summer jobs program. Are any taxpayers complaining that Service Canada isn't subsidizing large corporations? I was at the Service Canada branch in Barrie on the weekend, and I didn't see people up in arms because we weren't subsidizing Bacardi, in my colleague's riding, or Safeway, Ford, or Wal-Mart, as was the Liberal way in previous years when we put hard-earned taxpayer dollars into subsidizing corporations.

Have any of those corporations gone under? Are taxpayers complaining about this? Am I missing something that you can maybe share with us?

• (1710)

Hon. Monte Solberg: First of all, Wal-Mart is safe. I think they'll be fine without the money they got from the government in the past. We think it's important that this money be spent as effectively as possible, and that means two things. First, you do not subsidize companies that would hire people in any event. We did our own survey and found that three out of four private sector employers said they would hire people for the summer anyway. Second, obviously big companies like that just don't need the help.

On your other point, about universities, I was pleasantly surprised to see student groups coming out in support of our 40% increase in transfers to the provinces for post-secondary education. The president of the Association of Universities and Colleges, Claire Morris, actually thanked us for taking the important step to earmark that \$800-million increase, 40% increase, in the Canada social transfer. It will allow them to keep better account of how that money is spent.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Could you also expand on the registered education savings plan? I think that was another exciting aspect of the recent budget.

Hon. Monte Solberg: We made changes to the registered education savings plan so it could be used more easily for people who were going back to school after a number of years, for instance. We also raised the limit that people can put into it and that we, the government, contribute. The idea is that as the labour market ages people will increasingly have to go back to school—particularly community colleges—to get upgrading. Having access to the RESP will allow them to do that more easily.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Thank you.

The Chair: That's all the time we have.

I want to thank the ministers and the department heads for being here to answer questions today.

We're going to take a few minutes to move to committee business.

Thank you once again for being here.

Mr. Michael Savage: Chair, on a point of order, the agenda indicates that we're going to be hearing from the ministers until 5:30. Is that not what was agreed?

The Chair: No. We have committee business. We always leave half an hour for committee business. We've gone over that time, so we have 15 minutes left to deal with that issue.

Thank you once again for being here.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll suspend.

• (1710) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1715)

The Chair: If the members could come back to the table, we only have about 15 minutes, and there are bells.

There are two orders of business in particular that I would like to deal with today. The first one is the seventh report from the subcommittee, in which we'll deal with our agenda until the end of the year. The second one is Mr. Lessard's motion.

Those are two things that you need before you. If you take out the package, the last page deals with the subcommittee report we had this past week.

Yes, Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chairman, with all due respect, I suggest that we reverse the agenda, because we only have 10 minutes left. First, let us deal with the two motions. They are timely motions and the minister's answers allow us to decide what we want to do right now.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'll say it once again. There should be no discussion on the seventh report. It's what the subcommittee recommended. Let's get it passed and move right into motions. That would be my suggestion. There's no discussion on the subcommittee report.

Mr. Brown.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Chairman, I only wanted to mention the suggestion that we have extra hours this week. I'd suggest everyone

has really busy schedules as MPs. I think it's always best if we stick to the original hours allotted for the committee. I would throw that out there.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would say the only reason that we're looking at 9 to 12 is because if we are done clause-by-clause by noon, we will not meet on Thursday afternoon. It's to finish clause-by-clause.

We talked about going to clause-by-clause today, which obviously would have made no sense, and the subcommittee said it wasn't the case. I appreciate that. We've been trying to keep the hours to the limit.

If there's no other discussion, can we move to pass the subcommittee report?

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: I only wanted to say that a reference to a study in the fall on the prosperity gap is missing in the April 24 report.

The Chair: It will be something else that we'll bring up after the motions.

Mr. Tony Martin: Okay.

The Chair: All right.

Ms. Dhalla.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I'd like to move to pass this.

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

The Chair: The agenda is passed the way it is. It is only until the end of June. If there are going to be any other issues, we will have to meet again as a subcommittee.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Martin, we will be meeting as a subcommittee on Wednesday the 6th to discuss fall business before we do it. Thank you for moving forward on that.

Mr. Lessard, thank you for your patience. We'll go right to your motion.

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I tabled two motions before this committee. The first motion is about the list of companies—

[*English*]

The Chair: Hold on. In order that everyone has the motions, they are the last two motions of the package that was handed out. We'll be dealing with motion 20 and motion 21. Is that correct?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Yes.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, now that everyone has it in front of them, Mr. Lessard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chairman, I tabled two motions that deal with the Summer Career Placement Program. By tabling these motions, I want the committee to be fully informed about the situation of this program. The program was changed based on statements made here, but not verified by any members of the committee other than the Conservatives.

Therefore, let me read out motion no. 20:

That the Department of Human Resources and Social Development provide the list of non-profit organizations and private companies that receive grants under the **Canada Summer Jobs Program**...

[English]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: There's no need to go on.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: ...by riding; and the amount allocated to each riding in Canada for 2007.

Mr. Chairman, do you want me to read out the second motion or should we first deal with this one?

[English]

The Chair: I guess we're looking at motions 20 and 21. Is that correct?

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Yes, I can also read out motion 21, if you wish. We could deal with both motions at the same time because they are complementary. The first motion deals with the year 2006.

[English]

The Chair: I would say that I think the minister indicated today he would be happy to provide the list when it becomes available.

Is there any discussion on this?

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: There are two years: 2007 and 2006.

Motion 21 reads as follows:

That the Department of Human Resources and Social Development provide the committee with:

the list of private companies that receive grants and the amount of these grants under the 2006 Summer Career Placement Program, by riding.

Mr. Chairman, in this way, we will be able to receive the information that is given out, because allegedly, for instance, Wal-Mart, Rogers, Subway and other companies of this kind were awarded grants, and we find this amazing. I think that if that is the case, more should have been done than just changing the program. There may have been much permissiveness in some very specific ridings and perhaps this is what needed correction. We cannot discard the whole body just because of a sore foot.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I have Ms. Dhalla, Ms. Yelich, and Mr. Lake.

Ms. Dhalla.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Chair, I just wanted to add, I think you had mentioned that the minister had said that he would forward that

information. From my understanding of listening to the minister, I think he had said that he would be forwarding the criteria and information in regard to how the program was administered.

I think Mr. Lessard's motion is extremely important. There have been a number of students who have been impacted. The program has been substantially cut, and I think it is important that we do receive information about which non-profit organizations have received funding and where they are located in the country, because I, like many of the other MPs around this table, have received numerous phone calls from not only students, but also many organizations that greatly benefited from employing students and providing them with employment over the summer months. So this is a motion that would definitely have the support, I'm sure, of many members.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Ms. Yelich, Mr. Lake, and Mr. Savage.

Ms. Yelich.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I have no argument, but what I do want to say is that on May 17, on that whole day, I would like us to do the meetings here in the Centre Block, if you would do it, because if we're going to be stuck in the House of Commons—we have too many duties—we can't be running across the street.

The Chair: We will certainly make a request. That's a separate issue we'll deal with afterwards.

Mr. Lake, Mr. Savage, then Mr. Martin.

Mr. Mike Lake: I just want to clarify, actually. As I'm reading the two motions, I think you said they're complementary motions, they're meant to go together. I'm curious, maybe it's just a misprint or something, but I'm wondering why they're different. Why in one case are you asking for information that's different from the other year?

The Chair: There are no private programs in 2007. He just wanted clarification.

Mr. Mike Lake: That's the exact point I'm trying to make. He's asking for the non-profits and privates for 2007, and he's just asking for private companies in 2006. Is there a reason?

● (1725)

The Chair: He wants to substantiate what claims were made. This is money that went to businesses is what I'm assuming. I don't want to speak for—

Mr. Mike Lake: No. I would like it actually if he could maybe clarify. That would be good.

The Chair: Go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Our colleague has put a very timely question. On the one hand, we all have the information about the non-profit organizations for 2006, because the work was done in the ridings, in collaboration with the MPs. I think that we need more specific details about the private sector in 2006. We do not have all the information, and you will not object to our finding out exactly where the organizations are located.

Mr. Chairman, he just asked me a question and then changed the subject.

[*English*]

The Chair: I hope he listened.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: In two minutes, he will put the same question again.

[*English*]

The Chair: No, I won't let him.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Lake, Mr. Brown, Mr. Chong and the minister each gave us examples to justify changing the Summer Career Placement Program. Mr. Lake spoke about Wal-Mart, Mr. Brown spoke about Rogers, Mr. Chong spoke about Wal-Mart, Rogers and Subway and the minister spoke about the big restaurant chains.

It looks like they only want to inform a few select members of the committee about these things to enable them to oppose the remaining members. I think that all the members of the committee, given their mandate, must receive the same information, and not only allegations, but also information supported by concrete documents showing where things were done and how. Regarding Wal-Mart, we heard of the enormous figure of \$265,000. For these reasons, and to respond to Mr. Lake, I think that both my motions should be adopted.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We have Mr. Savage, Mr. Martin, then Mr. Lake again.

Mr. Michael Savage: I would support this motion, but I want to know not just who received grants this year, but also who applied and didn't get them. To me that's very important as well. If Mr. Lessard would accept a friendly amendment, I would put that in here; if not, I'll propose my own separate amendment. I will support this as it is, but I want to find out as soon as possible who applied and did not get them. That's a big part of the story.

The Chair: Are you proposing an amendment, then, Mr. Savage?

Mr. Michael Savage: I would like to propose an amendment to number 20: "the list of non-profit organizations and private companies that received grants, and those who applied and were not successful, under"... blah, blah, blah.

Hon. Michael Chong: There's no unanimous consent in this committee for that change.

Mr. Michael Savage: If the proposer accepts it, it can be accepted.

Hon. Michael Chong: That's not unanimous consent. You require unanimous consent to table. There's not unanimous consent here to do that.

Mr. Michael Savage: You don't need unanimous consent.

The Chair: No, it's just an amendment.

Now the discussion will go to his amendment. We can vote on that amendment and go back to the original motion.

We'll start a new list discussing the amendment Mr. Savage has proposed.

Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake: The first question I would have is maybe we should include the wording "subject to the Privacy Act", if we're going to do that. There may be some concerns there.

Mr. Michael Savage: In my riding, every year I know who applies and who didn't before. That was the—

Mr. Mike Lake: Okay. But if it's not an issue, then it won't be an issue, but perhaps you can add it.

The Chair: Okay, so do I have Mr. Martin? This is a comment on the amendment? I've still got your name down for the original motion.

Mr. Tony Martin: Yes, I want to make a further amendment.

The Chair: Okay, a subamendment of the amendment of the amendment.

Mr. Tony Martin: Yes—to ask, for 20 and 21, that this report come back to this committee by June 1.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Chair, can we put this to a vote, please?

The Chair: We've got people on the list we've got to hear.

Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: A point of order, Mr. Chair, through you to the clerk. Amending a motion requires unanimous consent, does it not?

The Chair: No.

Hon. Michael Chong: It doesn't. Okay, thank you.

The Chair: All right.

I've now got a subamendment to the amendment to the motion. The subamendment is that it be reported back by June 1. Okay? So I will now....

Hold on one second.

My mistake: this is another amendment. We need to go back to the one that Mr. Savage has made.

Is there any more discussion on this, in terms of that?

• (1730)

Mr. Mike Lake: Can you read the amendment, please?

The Chair: Yes. The motion is that the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development furnish the committee with the list of non-profit organizations and private companies that received grants, and those that applied and who were denied, under the Canada Summer Jobs program, by riding, and the amount allocated to each riding in Canada for 2007.

Mr. Brown.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Allison, do we have any expectations—I'm not sure who would—of the timelines on this, how long this would take the public service or the minister's office to prepare?

The Chair: That's a good question. I have no idea what kind of work would be required.

Ms. Yelich.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: We just agreed with the first two, why couldn't we have done as such? Why put a timeline on it all of a sudden? The minister said he would provide it, and I don't think there's any problem with that.

An hon. member: They both agreed.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Yes.

The Chair: Once again, that's—

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: We agreed to the original motion. I'd like these subamendments written out so I could read them before we vote on them, because I'm not sure why we would have a subamendment and an amendment to the amendment.

The Chair: We just have two amendments to the motion. That was my mistake. That wasn't a subamendment.

Mr. Brown.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Allison, what I suggest, to make this a bit cleaner, because we don't have this in writing right now and there's certainly stuff added on to Mr. Lessard's motion.... I have no problem with Mr. Lessard's motion; I would have happily supported it, but I think we're confusing it a bit at the last minute. I think that's unfortunate, because we heard the minister say here today he is very happy to provide that list.

I understand it's also on the web already, so any information is there. But if we're going to create work that's going to take tons of time, with a convoluted amendment that could keep people away from working on things that are important, like child care, like support for seniors, all the great things we heard about today, it would certainly be disappointing.

I suggest we do this properly, that we get these printed out for the next possible time the committee could look at it. Certainly on numerous occasions we make time available in our schedules to deal with this. I think it would be better to recognize that we have votes tonight and adjourn the meeting, because I'm sure we all have many, many things to say.

I'm sure I'd have more things to say, but recognizing that we have votes, instead of talking about this for half an hour or 45 minutes, which it could take—and we hate to miss our votes—why don't we just move to adjourn and deal with this when we have adequate time?

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Patrick Brown: So I'd like to move that we adjourn the meeting.

The Chair: There's a superseding motion to adjourn.

(Motion negatived)

The Chair: We'll continue with the list.

Mr. Lessard, and then Mr. Chong.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chairman, an attempt like the one that was just made could prevent us from voting. Our colleagues say that they are in favour of the motions. This is not a complicated issue. Basically, there are two elements. The minister said that he would not provide us with the list, and that we should go to the website,

Mr. Chairman. The minister disposes of means that we do not have. He could give us a list by riding. It is not complicated, if we give a date for handing it in. There is no need to draft the amendment. I think that we are ready for the vote. Afterwards, we could table the report before the House. Therefore, Mr. Chairman, I move that we vote now.

[*English*]

The Chair: I have to suspend the meeting right now, which means this has to be the first order of business when we come back Thursday morning.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Please call the question, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Well, there are still people who want to talk about that.

I believe there was broad support for the original motion before the amendments.

I still have two people—

Hon. Michael Chong: It may violate the Privacy Act.

The Chair: I have the 48th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs....

Go ahead, Mr. Savage.

• (1735)

Mr. Michael Savage: If the government is indicating that they would support the original motion, then I will withdraw my amendment if we vote tonight. With their permission, I'll bring that forward as a separate motion on Thursday morning at nine o'clock.

The Chair: Do we have unanimous consent for him to withdraw his motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Amendment Withdrawn)

The Chair: Okay. Are we finished talking, then? Can we go back to Mr. Lessard's motion?

We'll do number 20.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Savage, for that.

On number 21, now.

Mr. Mike Lake: I have one quick point. All I want to do is make it consistent with number 20. You refer to private companies, but in number 21 you do not refer to non-profit organizations. I want to get the same information for both years.

Mr. Michael Savage: That's a friendly amendment.

Mr. Mike Lake: It's a friendly amendment to say a "list of private companies and non-profit organizations".

The Chair: Is the friendly amendment okay—for privates as well as for non-profits? All right, then.

We'll vote on the amendment.

(Amendment agreed to)

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

The Chair: We have a confidence vote.

The meeting is adjourned.

Thank you very much.

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