



House of Commons
CANADA

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

HUMA • NUMBER 011 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, February 7, 2008

—
Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

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

Thursday, February 7, 2008

•(0910)

[English]

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

Go ahead, Mr. Lessard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): If I correctly understand what Mr. Lake said, we're now going to a public session.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

To put the motion I introduced in this committee in context, I'll say that it is directly consistent with the position of the opposition parties regarding the \$1 billion placed in trust, a measure that was taken this week by means of the government bill approved by the opposition parties. The opposition parties clearly indicated that that \$1 billion was clearly not enough. In fact, that amount must not only provide assistance to two sectors, the manufacturing and forestry sectors, but it must also be spread over a three-year period. Furthermore, that \$1 billion is being allocated without any consideration of how the crisis varies from region to region, in other words by province. Quebec, for example, bears 32% of the impact of the manufacturing crisis, among other things, within the industry as such. We see that a province like Prince Edward Island is receiving the same base amount of \$10 million as the other provinces. And yet its population is 123,000 inhabitants, whereas that of Quebec has more than seven million inhabitants.

From the outset, we can see that the distribution is unfair, Mr. Chairman. That's one of the aspects that the opposition parties raised. My colleagues will also be able to speak and introduce amendments to this motion, if that can make them more comfortable and enable them to express their own positions.

I will reread the motion, Mr. Chairman, in order to put it in context again:

That the committee recommend to the government, in view of the serious crisis in the forestry and manufacturing sectors, that it implement without delay an improved assistance plan for the forestry and manufacturing sectors, including \$1.5 billion in support measures for workers affected by the crisis, [...]

So we're targeting the workers affected by the crisis. One component concerns the industry directly. So it provides support for companies. I'll continue:

[...] including \$60 million for an income support program for senior workers [...]

This is about the POWA, Mr. Chairman. Where does this \$1.5 billion come from? The government has been racking up surpluses in the employment insurance fund for nearly 13 years. In 1997, that figure reached \$7 billion. To date, the amount diverted from the employment insurance fund has totalled more than \$55 billion.

In 2005, the Human Resources Committee unanimously voted in favour of eight of the 28 recommendations made to Parliament. They were the first eight, and this is the third. It states that this amount belongs to employers and workers. It was unanimously adopted at the time by those around this table. Our committee asked the government to return those amounts to the employment insurance fund.

As regards the amount in Canada's Consolidated Revenue Fund, that's part of a debate that I won't start here this morning. In view of the way things are still being done, a \$1.44 billion surplus has been generated this year. An amount of \$60 billion is therefore being allocated to income support for older workers, as well as a reserve of \$1.44 billion.

•(0915)

That's this year's surplus, Mr. Chairman. So we don't have to take new money from other accounts, money for which we have to levy a tax. This money is in the fund and has been generated as a surplus. Instead of applying it against the debt, this \$1.44 billion, as a result of the urgent need to act on the crisis, should be placed in a special fund "until an independent fund is created; and that the adoption of this motion be reported to the House at the earliest opportunity." That's instead of an argument while I'm reading.

What's being raised here this morning, and what is put before us, are the reports of the other committees that have had to consider a number of motions. I recall that the motions introduced in the other committees are not identical to this one. The only committee that used the provisions of the motion before us this morning is the Standing Committee on Finance. That committee only had to examine this aspect. Four other measures were provided for in the motion of the Standing Committee on Finance, which had to dispose of them together.

This morning, we are considering the appropriateness of this motion for this committee, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. It reflects our responsibility, since our committee has authority over employment insurance as regards recommendations made to the House. That is why I think we should consider it and dispose of it regardless of who may have spoken in the other committees, since this wasn't the responsibility of the other committees. I'm not saying they shouldn't have considered the matter and given an opinion, but, if things had been done in the necessary order, it seems to me it should have been studied here first so that we could make our recommendations to the Standing Committee on Finance. That was not the case. The fact of having proceeded in reverse order also created expectations on the Standing Committee on Finance. What's done is done and I blame no one, but we can see the dynamic that has developed here.

In short, I think our committee should adopt this motion. It can of course be amended, but I don't think there should be any amendment as to its substance, with regard to the surpluses generated in the employment insurance fund, for two reasons. First, our committee has previously stated the unanimous position that the money in the employment insurance fund must belong to workers and employers. Second, if there is one moment when the House of Commons should be called upon to take a position on its obligations to workers who lose their jobs, it is now, as a result of the urgent nature of the crisis.

Thank you.

• (0920)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

So far, we have Mr. Savage and Ms. Yelich on the list.

Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I'd also like to thank you for clearing up the confusion about yesterday. I think it makes eminent sense that we have Mr. Martin at the subcommittee. Not that Madame Savoie, if she would be the replacement, wouldn't be more than adequate, but Tony is the regular committee member. He has had a death in the family.

I want to clarify that the subcommittee will take place outside of the times of the regular meeting next week.

The Chair: That's correct.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you, again, for your work yesterday in putting this back together.

I thank our colleague, Mr. Lessard, for bringing forward this motion. It is our view that there has not been enough done for the crisis in manufacturing and the forestry industry. We think the response of the government to date is inadequate.

Just over two years ago, the Liberal Party proposed a \$1.5 billion program to help the forestry sector. It had booked that money, and then the new government killed that program. The commitment of the Liberal Party is clear on this. Our leader has made a number of policy statements about the manufacturing sector. Recently there was

a plan for the advanced manufacturing prosperity fund, which would not only help the ailing manufacturing sector but also drive research and development for green technologies.

We believe there is much to be done. The different parties have positions as to specifically what should be done. It is not my intention, nor I believe my colleagues' intention, to support this motion as it is. We do support the intent of it. I would be prepared to propose either a friendly amendment or, depending on the state of Mr. Lessard's countenance, perhaps an unfriendly amendment. I won't do that now. We'll perhaps see where the debate goes.

We support the intent of the motion, but we want to recommend to the government that they do more. We want to make it clear that we think the response to date has been inadequate. We don't necessarily want to slip the Bloc Québécois platform on this into the motion. We wouldn't support that. We want to show our commitment to doing more for the manufacturing sector.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Savage.

Mrs. Yelich.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Am I correct that the finance committee rejected the motion? Is it even in our purview? Would we be able to accomplish anything with this motion? According to this motion we're asking the finance minister to reallocate. As is well known, we've already given the billion dollars for the community development trust. We've given the forestry workers \$127.8 million for the long-term competitiveness initiative, and there is the targeted initiative for older workers. Some of the programs that are already in place were not mentioned.

I'm wondering if this is above those programs. And could we do anything anyway, if it's really in Finance's purview? That's why it ended up at Finance. Finance has now rejected it, so is it in our purview? I would like to see the motion rejected so we can go back to the employability study. I'd like to see the employability study before we break.

The Chair: To comment on that, certainly just asking for money is probably not within our purview, but it does reference income support programs and employment insurance funds, which are under HR, so that would be something we could recommend.

To go back to your point on whether that needs to be debated now or it should come after the employability study, once again we have other pending legislation. There are two private members' bills that need to be dealt with, as well as a study on poverty. So we'll have to decide what amount of time, if any, is going to be devoted to this.

Part of the reason these motions get reported to the House is so there can be concurrent debate. We need to be mindful of that as well. There is another reason for these. It's not just that the Bloc would like to see money given to the industry, it also provides an opportunity for them to talk about it in the House. That's the other thought on that.

That was for clarification.

• (0925)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I'm just saying that there is new money targeted for this industry in particular. There's \$127.8 million. That's ignoring what has been done. The \$1 billion community development trust is starting to be developed. There is a new targeted initiative for older workers—\$70 million.

I'm not sure what we'd accomplish by dropping the employability study and going into this motion when it has already been looked at by Finance. How many times can you take that particular sector and keep reallocating money? That's probably why they rejected it. They want to do it, and they want to do it right. And I think they've done it. For us to interject might cause some hardship and maybe even cause a delay. I don't know why we would continue this.

The Chair: Thank you.

It will certainly cause a delay, there's no question about that.

I have Madame Savoie.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

From what I've read, there are precedents for assisting workers in a crisis and for assisting workers, communities and industries. The idea is thus to restructure industries to make them greener. The idea is not to do one thing or the other.

Everyone knows that the employment insurance fund is no longer really used to assist workers. Many workers are excluded and are not eligible for benefits. My impression is that this motion restores the purpose for which the employment insurance fund was to be used when it was established.

Mr. Savage spoke of an amendment. I would like to listen to that amendment, but I think we have a responsibility to use that fund for the purposes for which it was established.

[*English*]

The Chair: I have Mr. Lessard on the list, and if there are no other further comments, I'll have Mr. Savage propose his amendment after him—unless, of course, there are more people on the list.

Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

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

I stated at the outset that we didn't claim to be introducing a perfect motion that could be supported by the three opposition parties. I also recalled that establishing an additional contribution level was, if you'll permit the anglicism, a must, an obligation. As you will no doubt understand, I'm taking my precautions before the amendment is introduced, since we'll then have to debate it as drafted.

It seems to me that the amendment will at least have to retain this mandatory character in a very targeted and defined way, as regards improving or enhancing the Conservatives' plan. So the idea is to state the level and to increase it. That's the essence of our motion.

I also don't want our Liberal Party friends to get the impression they are adopting the Bloc québécois platform. If that were the case,

this would be quite a bit more elaborate. Whatever the case may be, that's not how we view the matter. This is very fragmentary. The motion seems to be gathering the support of the opposition parties. The announcement made by the Liberal Party, in particular, on improved assistance to the two industries brings us to a total of \$2.5 billion.

Furthermore, Mr. Chairman, I recall that, during the election campaign—and I have documents confirming what I'm saying—the Conservatives condemned the measures taken by the Liberal Party, saying that they impoverished families. They promised at the time to remedy the situation. Last November 10, barely three months ago, the leader of the Liberal Party, Mr. Dion, gave a press conference in Toronto at which he promised to attack poverty. However, saying you want to attack poverty does nothing to change the situation. You gain credibility by announcing measures and defending them. Those measures must be clarified. It's not theoretical; it's concrete. When people are poor, that tells us that programs are no longer suited to today's needs.

According to the Employment Insurance Commission, only 46% of individuals who contribute to employment insurance and who lose their jobs can hope to receive employment insurance benefits. A study by the Canadian Labour Congress put the figure at 38% to 40%. If the figure is 46%, that's appalling. That means that 54% of those people are excluded from employment insurance. When you lose your job, you no longer have any income. That's inevitably a major factor in aggravating poverty.

It can now be said, without exaggeration, that the situation is dramatic for forestry and manufacturing sector workers. In each of the ridings that our committee colleagues, including our Conservative colleagues, represent, people are experiencing a dramatic situation because their plants have shut down. In Quebec, its clothing and shoe factories, and even businesses belonging to a high-tech industry. Approximately 123 communities live from forestry. When the sawmill closes, woodcutters leave the job sites, and people want to find work. In this situation, the Conservatives recommend that they go and work in Manitoba, where they need labour.

• (0930)

When you're 55 years old and you live in Baie-Comeau, Roberval, Val-d'Or, La Sarre or La Tuque, do you pack your bags and uproot yourself from your community without knowing what you'll be doing in Alberta or for how long you can be guaranteed a job? In Alberta, the cost of living is so high that, even if you earn more money than in Ontario, the Maritimes or Quebec, it will be starvation wages.

Twelve percent of people who work use food banks. To my great surprise, 18% of Alberta workers use food banks. So that means that more people use food banks in the province where the economy is operating at full capacity, thanks to oil, than elsewhere. These people are working, but their incomes are inadequate. The kind of housing that would cost \$750 a month in the Maritimes, for example, costs \$1,500 a month in Alberta, twice as much.

When these matters are overlooked, I also appeal to our people from western Canada. Sometimes when you have money in your pockets, you forget the poor. When you see the money in circulation in western Canada, you get the impression they're acting as though there were no poverty. We went to western Canada on our tour, and we saw a fair amount of poverty.

When we were in Regina and Winnipeg, our colleague Mr. Martin went out at night to see the situation of the homeless. He told me about that the next morning. These people had jobs. Some of them also testified before our committee.

We're talking about our situation in Quebec—I see our colleague from Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière—but we're surrounded by people who claim that everything's going well because the economy is doing well in Canada and only two sectors aren't doing well. You have to see where those sectors are located and what damage has been caused, including the ridings where that's happening.

For example, let's take Mr. Dion's commitment—but it could be that of Mr. Harper—during the election campaign. He promised to attack poverty. How can you go about that? Do you just say that when you're on a podium in order to get elected? My goal isn't to be here as long as possible.

I've gotten to a certain point in my life, and I have other things to do than come here. I'm here because I have convictions. My two objectives are Quebec sovereignty and to ensure that, in the meantime, we defend those who elect us and who are disadvantaged. One way to defend them is to adopt concrete measures such as those on the table today. Otherwise, it's all talk and empty words; that makes no sense.

Mr. Chairman, I'm a bit emotional this morning because I find this unfortunate. Our colleagues here aren't bad people. They have good intentions, they work hard, and they have their convictions. Unfortunately, at times, when you find yourself in a particular situation, especially when you want to get into or stay in power, you try to adopt more visible measures for the do-gooders.

Would it be possible, at some point, to compromise a little? One way to compromise and to support those in need is the way we favour. There could be accommodations, but not on substance, the amount or the recommendation to the House.

• (0935)

If we're saying this is what should be right, if this is an honest wish, if we're also setting a quota and this isn't going to the House, then we're not telling the “real story”. It seems to me we know each other well enough to tell each other the truth.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

I now have on the list Ms. Yelich, Mr. Lake, and Mr. Gourde.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I just want to make a couple of comments.

Mr. Lessard talked about western Canada, and the poor people they saw. Some of the policies we brought in—the working income tax benefit—are supposed to...because we're talking about the working poor, so that is part of the WITB program. Then they asked about the people who are not eligible for employment insurance.

That is exactly what the labour market agreements were with the provinces.

So there has to be an acknowledgement of what has been done, specifically that every problem he has cited is being responded to through programs, and the increased funding in all these areas has been more than has ever been funded.

If you want to talk about the homeless, there is the partnering strategy; we're trying to engage local communities and community leaders and our provinces. A lot of this is worked through the province where the employment insurance...where they're not eligible.

When it comes to employment insurance, the benefits are being used for training. As well, we're spending a lot of money on skills and training, because many people here in the employability study have said that part of the solution to poverty is to get a good job and to get training and skills. I would say most of our employability study concentrates on that, and if we do this right, this motion can be moot, because we can be discussing all the things he has suggested. All of these scenarios are coming through on our employability study, and that's why I urge us to get back to the employability study. Let's have it done before Easter.

I think all the things that he said come up, each motion, one by one.... We hear that these issues are critical and they're crises, and that's why the sooner we get some of these ideas into print, into a report, and acknowledged by the government, I think the sooner some of these situations he is telling us about today can be looked at, because we are working for all of Canada.

I realize he's only working for Quebec, but we want Quebec to be a part of this, and that is why we have looked at the big picture. I'm sorry, we have to include Quebec with our policies and programs. I'm really disappointed he doesn't want them to be a part of it. I just think that they, too, want to be part of the economy. It's growing. Quebec, particularly, did very well with the targeted initiative for older workers; because they were in a crisis situation, they got more. I believe they got quite a bit of the funding, more than others.

More than any other government, we invested in all these programs. It's not something that can be dismissed through a motion, when this is what our employability study is all about—all these situations, all these scenarios. It's why we're here and it's why we want to get this employability study done. We are in critical.... There are labour shortages and skills shortages. That's what we're looking at, so I think the sooner we get back to this study....

I do not want to see it go past Easter. I have no time to spend at extra meetings trying to get it done, because all of a sudden they're going to decide we need this employability study done. I want to do it now and do it properly. I think we'll address all the issues this motion is trying to do. So why don't we work through this, and then he can perhaps make these suggestions, and they will be good suggestions.

Thank you.

• (0940)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Yelich.

I have Mr. Lake, Mr. Gourde, Mr. Savage, Ms. Sgro.

Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): There are a lot of things wrong with this motion. First of all, it's clearly an obstructive motion, in the sense that we have virtually the same motion being presented in five separate committees. Right at the start, there's the obstructive component of it, because obviously we're clogging up the business of five committees as we deal with this.

It's already been noted that the finance committee dealt with the motion and voted against it. Every single word in our motion was contained in their motion, plus a few extras. Fortunately, in that committee, at least three Liberal members, including their finance critic, voted against it. So I'm hoping we'll get the same result here and will actually move on to this important employability study we're dealing with.

What else is wrong? You have a motion made in committee, kind of symptomatic of the ad hoc approach of the Bloc, that would propose to spend an amount equivalent to 2% of the federal budget via a one-paragraph motion made in committee. There's something wrong with that.

The Bloc member says he's unhappy, but I would note that if you look at transcripts from this committee, it's always doom and gloom with this particular member. Notwithstanding the fact that outside the committee I find him to be a very amenable man, inside the committee it's always doom and gloom.

We're sitting in a situation in which our economy is one of the strongest in the world. Under this Conservative government, our employment rate right now is higher than it's been in three decades. With the new steps we've taken, I would point out that we are ahead of the curve right now, having come out with an economic statement in the fall. The federal government will soon be taking less money from Canadians than it has in half a century. Of course, the flip side to that is that Canadians will have more money to spend on the things they need.

If you had a chance to read the C.D. Howe Institute report on poverty, an organization named after a former Liberal cabinet minister, poverty rates are actually going down in this country, contrary to what you have to say. It's not to say that we don't still have some work to do, but poverty rates are coming down. To that end, we have a very important poverty study that's been instigated and pushed by a member of the NDP. I think we're all looking forward to getting on with that study. Things like this just bog us down.

I would encourage us to deal with this motion quickly, vote it down, get on with finishing the employability study, and then get to work on this poverty study that I think is so important to all of us.

• (0945)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lake.

We're going to move to Mr. Gourde, and then to Mr. Savage and Ms. Sgro.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Chairman, I'd simply like to make a few comments on this motion.

A request is being made to increase funding, but no long-term solution is being provided for the forestry sector or workers. The forest industry is currently in transformation. Some ways of doing things will change. Better equipment will no doubt enable these people to work. They will also have to get training in order to learn how to operate the new equipment. New equipment often enables workers in this sector to be more productive, but it inevitably takes away their jobs. That's sad, but that's the way it is.

So some of these workers may have to change industries. In Abitibi-Témiscamingue, for example, 30% of workers are turning toward the mining industry. The service industries, which manufacture a lot of equipment for the manufacturing and forestry sectors, are now making equipment for the mining industry. Workers have been able to take development training and have benefited from the new equipment, which has enabled them to change industries.

I'd like to make a comment on labour displacement, to which Mr. Lessard referred. In my riding, people 60 years old came to see me to tell me they wanted to venture off to western Canada for a year or two. They asked me whether I thought that was a good idea. I told them they were free to go if they wanted to do so. In Canada, every individual has a right to work where he or she wishes. No government wants to uproot people here and there. The decision to leave and work in western Canada for a year or two is a personal choice. I believe you'll agree on that.

Are these people unhappy? They came to see me again, and they're very happy. Sixty-year-olds often want to work. They form a highly skilled and very much appreciated labour force because they have the necessary skills, which they can transmit to future generations. Are they well supported there? The answer yes. Are they well housed? Yes, because companies often house these workers. As regards wages, they all told me that one month's wages was equivalent to three months' wages in Quebec. They're very happy and that's enabling them to build a little nest egg for their retirement.

You shouldn't think that workers are stuck in a situation. Some workers, as a result of their leadership, will find solutions. They'll find solutions for their industry because they're close to the resource. They no doubt have the best ideas for improving their fate. We must give them the tools and permit the development of a future plan that will no doubt save the forest industry in Canada. It's these people who will do it. It's not by investing money or waiting for the situation to resolve itself. The leadership will come from the regions, and the government is fully confident in all these competent people who live there. That will guarantee a prosperous future for all the regions and Canada.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

We will now move to Mr. Savage, and I still have Ms. Sgro on the list.

Mr. Savage.

• (0950)

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you, Chair.

Further to the conversation that Mr. Lessard started, Mr. Lessard makes impressive use of words both in passion and sheer volume. I listen carefully to what we says because in spite of the differences I have with the Bloc on many issues, I know they are profoundly democratic and believe in democracy. This is a democracy that we are here today taking part in, and he would know that we have every right to amend the motion. He may like it or he may not. We support, as I've indicated, the intent of it, but we don't believe that these specific measures he has here are appropriate, not by themselves. We don't think it makes sense to have them as part of the motion. So I will be amending that.

He mentions Mr. Dion and poverty, and he says we need more than words. Well, we've had more than words from Mr. Dion. He's not the Prime Minister of Canada yet, and when he is, I think people will say, okay, here's a guy who actually means what he says. It's pretty significant for a national party leader to talk about poverty, particularly one who has an opportunity to be the Prime Minister of Canada, because poverty is not a vote-getter. Everybody needs help, but the people who need our help the very most, the people who in Halifax spend the night at the Metro Turning Point Centre Shelter and go to Hope Cottage for breakfast and maybe take advantage of Phoenix youth programs for challenged young adults and who work for the National Coalition for the Homeless, they don't buy anything. They don't get the advantage of the GST. We sometimes hear from the government that the GST helps the poorest, and I think some of them believe that, but these people don't buy anything.

There's something else that all of these people who absolutely need our help have in common, and that is most of them don't vote. They don't even know or care about elections, but they are human beings who need help. There is very little political advantage in poverty, so when Stéphane Dion came forward and announced his 30/50 plan, that meant a lot to me, as somebody who thinks we should do more for those who need help the most. It is not political. It is entirely in keeping with what Stéphane Dion believes is the future of Canada, and I'm proud of that.

EI is a piece of it. I would be the first to suggest that we need to have a look at how EI works in Canada. Mr. Lessard mentioned the 2000 vote of this committee on EI. The government now would have been the opposition then, I suspect, and would have supported that motion. They have since changed their minds, in part because there is no EI surplus. There is every year more money that goes into EI than comes out, but there is no continuing surplus. The money goes into the Consolidated Revenue Fund of the Government of Canada. Should we do something about EI? Absolutely. Every year there is more going in than coming out. Employers should get a piece of that. I think employees should get a piece of that.

I supported Bill C-269, the Bloc bill. That would have extended benefits on employment insurance. But we need to look at GIS, the child tax benefit, housing, education, literacy, and all these other things as well. That will be part of our plan.

I just want to make sure there isn't any questioning of our motives on this. We support this motion's intent. We do not believe it is an appropriate thing to put those specific dollar figures into it. I will

amend in such a way as to take it out. If it doesn't come out, we will not support this motion. If it does, we will support the motion. We believe there's a lot the Government of Canada is not doing that they should do, and we'll vote accordingly—or I will.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Savage.

Ms. Sgro.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Savage said it all.

The Chair: All right.

I have to go with what's on the list.

Mr. Lessard, go ahead, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: It's quite amusing: Ms. Sgro says that Mr. Savage said it all. She had to think about it, but, ultimately, did he say it all?

But enough joking around. Mr. Chairman, the committee's report was tabled on January 15, 2005. It's quite recent since the government didn't actually give a response to the report until 2006. So it was barely two years ago. So it's quite current. A number of people around this table attended the committee's proceedings, including our colleague Mr. Cuzner, who moreover chaired the committee or subcommittee at that time. Those proceedings went on for a number of months. Some staff members were there, and they did a remarkable job.

Mr. Chairman, I listened closely to my colleagues. I'll start with Mr. Savage's speech, which is very symptomatic of the situation. He's entirely right when he says that the poor, those who are the least well-off, are people who don't vote. That's understandable partly because they're excluded from society. So they increasingly lose interest in society. That probably explains this lack of will on the part of certain members to take a real interest in policies concerning the poor: it brings in few votes. I'm not saying that's our colleague Mr. Savage's intention, but it's simply the reality. That's why, when we as politicians make a commitment to fight poverty, most of us don't establish any monetary measures.

I believe our colleague Mr. Savage is entirely sincere as regards the substance of the issue. However, what he says clearly reflects the political dynamic. People will commit to and politically support what is politically profitable. That's what's happening here.

As for our colleague Mr. Lake, it's the same thing; it's sidestepping the issue. He simply said we were wasting our time. I understand why we're wasting our time: we're talking about poor people! We're not necessarily talking about those who are poor right now, but rather those who will be poor if we don't deal with them, because many will lose their jobs.

Let's immediately turn to employability. That's what we're talking about right now, unless I missed something, but I don't think so. When you talk about employability, you're talking about employment access conditions and employment retention. Our colleague Mr. Gourde clearly understood this. I don't share the conclusions of his remarks, but he acknowledges that there are job losses, that this is a new situation because it's occurring on a massive scale. He acknowledges that part of the labour force in these sectors is quite old. He says that we can return them to the labour market. If we don't return them here at home, we can send them out west, if they want. He's entirely right in saying that they are free to go there. However, do they have objective conditions in which to decide whether or not to go? I would ask our colleague to think about that.

Currently, an average of 20% of all those who lose their jobs are over 55 years of age. Every time 100 jobs are lost, at least 20 workers over 55 find themselves unemployed. In the manufacturing sector, 125,000 jobs have been lost. That means that 25,000 workers over 55 have been affected.

That's not a minor point, Mr. Chairman. Is there room for them in Alberta? Are employers interested in hiring workers over 55? Mr. Gourde even mentioned 60-year-olds. Mr. Chairman, they can no doubt be hired for short periods, but an entrepreneur who wants to fill career-track positions isn't interested in hiring these people because he'll have to invest in people who will only be working for a few more years.

● (0955)

The biggest problem is uprooting these people. Will 20,000 or 25,000 be going out west? That's not realistic, Mr. Chairman; it's not realistic. It's mainly young people who will be moving because their roots are new. A young couple will take some of their roots with them; they'll take their children and everything. For those over 55, their children and grandchildren are already settled, their living environment is settled, and they're quite a bit less motivated to go out west. It seems to me that suggesting the contrary is also a way of avoiding the issue, Mr. Chairman.

With all due respect to our colleague Mr. Gourde, who has conducted a quite accurate analysis of the situation, the conditions really are along the lines of a conservative policy. I'm not criticizing him for that; that's his political option. He has that right in a democracy. He especially has a right to express it, but it's a laissez-faire policy. Let's let people do what they want. Let's let the communities that can get people back to work do it, even if there aren't any jobs. One hundred and eleven or 123 municipalities—I'll spare you the figures—live solely off forestry. Neighbouring towns are quite remote; you don't go there by foot; you're in the forest.

Once again, these are loopholes in an attempt to justify a policy that doesn't hold up. It's a policy that should be called what it is, a laissez-faire policy, a conservative policy; it should be called that. Let people make do; it's inevitable. We'll invest a little; we'll make a symbolic gesture.

Mr. Chairman, I'll recall what \$1 billion represents for two industries across Canada. For Quebec, that means \$217 million divided by two. If we make a fair division, that means \$108 million per sector: forestry and manufacturing. That amount must be divided again by three, because it's spread over three years. Let me tell you

that doesn't do a lot to jump-start an industry? It cost more than that to conduct studies on the high-speed train, for example. With this amount, they want to jump-start two industries and support them.

There is unanimous agreement on one thing here: this is definitely inadequate; these measures do not meet the needs. I hope the final motion will at least reflect the opposition parties' intention. But perhaps someone on the Conservative side will have a burst of clear-sightedness. I won't say conscience, because I don't want to hurt them.

I'll close on a very personal note, Mr. Chairman. Our friend Mr. Lake has raised something. When I'm on Parliament Hill, I try to be friendly and easygoing with our colleagues because I recognize that there's work to be done. It's true that I'm more gloomy when I get here. That's because I witness attempts to sidestep the issue, and that depresses me. I heard that we were wasting our time, Mr. Chairman. I wasn't sad until I heard that. When I hear that kind of thing, I say to myself it's lamentable. So we're wasting our time talking about people who are dealing with a major crisis in the manufacturing and forestry sectors? It's scandalous to hear that, when they also say that we have to improve employability. That's highly contradictory but we're also talking about that.

● (1000)

[English]

The Chair: Okay, I have Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake: I think the—

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I'd just like to make an incidental comment. Mr. Lake—particularly since he's preparing to speak; this will give him the opportunity to return to this point—raises the concern that Quebec should do its share. Quebec has invested \$2 billion in the past two years to support these two sectors. Canada is investing \$1 billion in both sectors across the country. I would ask our colleague to get informed about the effort Quebecers have already made.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

I have Mr. Lake and then Mr. Savage.

Go ahead, Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake: I think maybe the difference, in terms of our approach to this, is that people need hope and people need opportunities. We see that. When things are as strong as they are, I don't know that we need to keep hammering home how bad they are, whether it be for political reasons or otherwise.

Clearly, the numbers speak for themselves. Clearly, the economy is one of the strongest in the world. Clearly, the employment rates are higher than they have been in decades. These are facts. Our poverty rates are lower, despite all the talk and the efforts to make people think they are higher than they are. Again, that's not to say we don't need to do some work on that.

When we talk about wasting time, I think it is really a question of priorities. We have before us an employability study and a poverty study to do. The C.D. Howe report clearly identified that a decrease in poverty is directly correlated with an increase in employment. It seems to me that we're already on the right track in this committee in dealing with employability and poverty—the two studies we're trying to tackle right now—which would go a long way in addressing the concerns you continually bring up.

I did want to address a few of the things you talked about. I'm interested in your wording. You used the phrase and were talking about sending people to western Canada. Nobody is talking about sending anybody anywhere. Simply allowing people to go where they want is freedom of mobility in terms of where the jobs are.

There have been a couple of reports on the news recently, and quite interesting reports, about some parts of the country—I believe I saw them talk about Newfoundland and Cape Breton. Workers have actually chosen to go to Alberta to work, have made a lot of money there, and have been able to find housing. Then they've gone home and reinvested the money they've made back into their communities. And now there's a little bit of a boom in certain areas in terms of people building houses and reinvesting in their communities and in their homes. It's an example to me of the way the system should work. I'm not sure why anyone would want to stand in the way of that. Now you have people working in their home communities to build these homes and to take advantage of the results of that freedom of mobility, in a sense.

You ask if we would take workers who are 55 years old. We'll take anyone who wants to come and work right now. We need workers in Alberta. We need people working. In fact, you talk about the cost of living being so high in Alberta. One of the reasons the cost of living is so high is because we can't find people to build the housing. So it becomes kind of a self-fulfilling situation. If we had workers willing to come, people who would choose to come and use the skills they have to help build the housing, then we'd have the housing, and the cost of living wouldn't be so high for the people coming. These are things we need to look at.

Again, just coming back one more time to the targeted initiative for older workers, and I think you used the phrase “the results of Conservative policy”, I'll point to the results of Conservative policy. There was \$72.5 million in the targeted initiative for older workers, and the result is that 50% of new workers to the labour force last year were over the age of 55. It clearly points out that some of these strategies are actually working. And I never hear any credit given for that. We always hear that now we need more.

If we really want to have an impact in this committee, the best thing we can do is carefully choose among the many good priorities in this committee and make the decision to focus on our employability study and make sure we get that done. Who knows when there might be an election? I think there are four colleagues in here who might know, but the rest of us are kind of at their whim.

•(1005)

But let's make sure, whenever that happens, that we have this employability study done. And if we're fortunate enough to avoid an election and continue to move forward, let's get going on this poverty study. Let's hear the witnesses, what they have to say about

this, when we get to that point, and let's work hard to ensure that we have a second good study to follow up on the good work we've done as a committee on the employability study.

But I think we would be best to have a vote on this motion and move on to the good things we've been working on.

•(1010)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lake.

I have Mr. Savage, Ms. Sgro, and Mr. Cuzner.

Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: Do the members want to speak before I read the amendment?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Yes, go ahead, Judy.

Mr. Michael Savage: I'll make the amendment once everybody has had a chance to speak.

Hon. Judy Sgro: I'm going to just add two words. I hate wasting time and being repetitive. I have to be totally honest, but I think everybody has made their case.

If anybody who picked up the *National Post* this morning and looked at the financial section wants to deny that we're going to be walking ourselves into a recession.... We'd better be careful. This whole issue that Mr. Lessard is raising and that we've been raising is flagging those concerns, the fear about where we're going.

Yes, the economy is still doing very well, and that is for a lot of reasons, but we're not going to escape it when the U.S. is being as affected as it is. The first people who are seeing that are those in the forestry and manufacturing sectors. That's why we continue to raise this issue. I support the intent of Mr. Lessard's motion and know that he cares passionately about this. As a government, we need to be ahead of the curve, not behind the curve.

I think the employability study is exactly what that's all about. The poverty study is trying to get out there. The fact is, though, the recession is probably heading our way faster than any results we'll have from either one of these studies, but at least it would lay out where we need to go and how we have to deal with things.

I believe we are here to help people, and that's the role of government—not to have the *laissez-faire*, “I don't give a damn” attitude. I think our job and a lot of what is being done in that employability study and being done here is good work. But it is 12 minutes after 10, and I don't think we're going to get anything done on that today, so let's see if we can't move this along and do the right thing for Canadians.

I can't support Mr. Lessard's motion in its current form. I don't like being specific about amounts. I think it's the intent and the direction to tell the government that we have some serious issues, so let's do some more work, and let's be proactive in trying to deal with this. You can't send 55-year-old or 60-year-old men or women out to the west, because a lot of those jobs just aren't going to be for them. But we do need to find some way of dealing with a very difficult area, which is what the employability study ultimately is going to help with.

So if we could just get on with it, I think it would be a good idea.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sgro.

I have Mr. Cuzner, then the motion by Mr. Savage.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Chair, I hate wasting time and being repetitive.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Judy Sgro: Sometimes you just have to do it.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: I want to mention two things, and it ties in with Mr. Lessard here.

We're seeing that the market is doing a much better job now. The Alberta employers are doing a much better job in accommodating workers from eastern Canada.

I spent nine years, through the late 1970s and early 1980s, back and forth to Fort McMurray. It's a place that I have a lot of time for and I still have a great number of friends there. There are a couple of different Fort McMurrays.

I have a brother who's working there now. The market is doing a tremendous job in accommodating skilled labour. They fly people out for three weeks and then they're home; it's a three-and-one rotation. They're out of the community. That money is coming back into our community, which is a positive thing. They're investing in their homes, they're buying new cars, they're buying their insurance, and their children still go to....

There's a social void, in that we don't have the coaches and they're not able to put the time in with the church group or be Boy Scout leaders, or whatever it might be. So it's different. But people in our community aren't foreign to that. We fished offshore draggers and we have many people who have military careers, but there still exists.... That's a great thing for people who are in a certain space where they're trained, they're skilled, they're able to go out there, and they have the confidence to take part in that economy.

I still have a couple of areas in my community that were devastated. They're still reeling from the downturn in the offshore fishery, which happened in the early 1990s. They haven't bounced back from that yet. They don't have the skills and they don't have the confidence.

There's one particular area in my constituency where it's been really tough dragging them over the hump. Sometimes the standard programs just can't get there. They need a little bit of something. If it's confidence or a change in attitude or the actual skills they need to support them, I still think government can play a role there.

Those communities are becoming fewer and fewer, but if we're staring down the barrel of a recession, they may become even more frequent; I don't know.

I don't disagree with what Mr. Lessard is saying at all. There are communities that need these supports, and I think government has a role to play.

•(1015)

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Now I'm going to move to you, Mr. Savage, if you'd like to make your amendment.

Mr. Michael Savage: I'll just read the motion with my amendment in it: "That the committee recommend to the government, in view of the serious crisis in the forest and manufacturing sectors", and then I want to add, "and the inadequate response of the government to date, that it implement without delay an improved assistance plan for the forestry and manufacturing sectors, and that the adoption of this motion be reported to the House at the earliest opportunity". So, I remove the section between "sectors" and "and" in the second to last line.

Should I say it again?

The Chair: Sure, one more time.

Mr. Michael Savage: It would read:

That the Committee recommend to the government, in view of the serious crisis in the forestry and manufacturing sectors and the inadequate response of the government to date, that it implement without delay an improved assistance plan for the forestry and manufacturing sectors, and that the adoption of this motion be reported to the House.

The Chair: All right. Is there any discussion on this amendment?

Mr. Mike Lake: Can you read the amendment one more time? Can you just read it as it stands now, the whole thing?

The Chair: It reads:

That the Committee recommend to the government, in view of the serious crisis in the forestry and manufacturing sectors and the inadequate response of the government to date, that it implement without delay an improved assistance plan for the forestry and manufacturing sectors

Then the rest of that is deleted down to the last line, which says "and that the adoption of this motion be reported to the House at the earliest opportunity".

All right. I'll just give you a chance to think about that, because Mr. Lessard will probably have something to say about that. Take your time. We've only been an hour and a half so far, so take another five minutes.

Yes, go ahead, Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I'd like to add a few words, Mr. Chairman. Part of the amendment has escaped me, so I'm going to reread it, and you'll tell me what's missing. It is being moved that the committee recommend to the government, in view of the serious crisis in the forestry and manufacturing sectors, that an improved assistance plan for the forestry and manufacturing industries be implemented as soon as possible and, in view of the inadequate response of the government to date, and that the adoption of this motion be reported to the House at the earliest opportunity.

Is that it? Did I translate it accurately? I felt there was a little bit—

[*English*]

The Chair: I would say that is essentially what was said. The only difference is that Mr. Savage added, after the first line up to the first comma, "That the Committee recommend to the government, in view of the serious crisis in the forestry and manufacturing sectors", the words, "and the inadequate response of the government to date, that it implement without delay an improved assistance plan for the forestry and manufacturing sectors, and that the adoption of this motion be reported to the House at the earliest opportunity."

So I would say you had the essence of it. It was just a question of where that was in place, a question of the context.

Mr. Lessard, did you want to comment? And then I have Madame Savoie.

• (1020)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chairman, may I ask you to suspend proceedings for just one minute so that we can consult? That might help speed up the process.

[English]

The Chair: Most definitely. Sure.

• _____ (Pause) _____

•

• (1025)

The Chair: Mr. Lessard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: First, Mr. Chairman, I very much appreciate your allowing this debate to be held before that on the amendment as such. I believe that enables us, even before we debate the amendment, to really see where each party stands on its commitment to the measures to somewhat soften the crisis in the forestry and manufacturing industries. It is all to the credit of the individuals present that they have made their positions known. In that sense, you have chaired the proceedings well.

The amendment proposed by our Liberal Party friends is obviously not the one we would have liked. However, it must be acknowledged that this amendment contains the observation that the \$1 billion in trust is distinctly inadequate. The merit of this amendment is that it informs the Conservative Party that it has not gone far enough in that regard. I think it's a genuine invitation to do more. There's also the fact that we're maintaining that we must report to the House, which makes it possible to continue the debate.

I think that the real value of this committee is that it affords us the opportunity to hold this kind of debate amongst ourselves in the precincts of the House of Commons. For that reasons, we will support Mr. Savage's amendment. So we will vote in favour of the amendment. Of course, it stands at the limit of what we can accept at this time. There shouldn't be any subamendment—we hope not—so that we can vote on the amendment.

[English]

The Chair: All right, so you'll be supporting that.

I believe we had a list from before.

Madame Savoie, did you want to speak? Then I have Mr. Lake and Ms. Yelich on the amendment.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Thank you.

It's clear on this side of the table that we all feel very clearly that the government's reaction to this crisis has been inadequate, to say the least.

Ms. Sgro mentioned earlier that we can't tell the government how much, and I certainly don't have those numbers at hand either, but

Mr. Savage made the comment before making his motion that there is no surplus from employment insurance because it goes to general revenue. I guess that's technically correct, so it's basically a virtual fund, in a sense.

What is true that no one can deny is that fewer and fewer people have become eligible. That way government has protected itself from the economic changes; fewer people have become eligible, and more women have suffered. Even fewer women than men have become eligible, and more people have been left without skills.

Mr. Lake mentioned I think a reference to the C.D. Howe Institute's report on poverty. It must be the only think tank in Canada saying that, because certainly the TD economic forum report did not concur, and any other serious analysis does not suggest that we're going in the right direction. Yes, we are living in good economic times at the moment. There are many things that are happening around us that could change that radically.

I think it's unfortunate that we have lost the reference to creating a special fund from employment insurance. It would have given a commitment to the people of Canada that we do recognize that workers, employers, and small business contribute to that, and that it can be there in time of need, which isn't the case now. It's like buying insurance for your house and the house burns and you can never collect it. That's the situation people find themselves in, in Canada.

Having said that, I think this is a motion, the way it reads now, that clearly recognizes that the government's reaction is inadequate. It's a motion that blames the government for not responding in a more humane way to this crisis, which, as has been mentioned, is much more pronounced in Quebec and Ontario, and I have to say in British Columbia as well, certainly in the forestry sector with mills closing. I think there are a lot of causes for that, with the softwood lumber agreement. Nevertheless, I think it is a serious crisis, and it does require a stronger response than the government offered in its \$1 billion over a number of years spread across Canada.

So I will be supporting the amendment.

• (1030)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I have on the list now Mr. Lake and Ms. Yelich.

Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake: I have to say it's refreshing to hear a member of the NDP actually acknowledge the current strength of the economy.

I'm interested in the amendment here. It's obviously a political poke in the eye from Mr. Savage, which we're used to seeing. It kind of hearkens back to the start of the committee in this new Parliament, when members from that side were passing motion after motion calling on ministers to resign, or whatever the case, and just kind of playing political games.

I'm going to move a subamendment now. I don't expect it to pass, because it's as ridiculous as the Liberal amendment, but it does make a point. I'd like to remove the words "and the inadequate response of the government to date", and "improved". We'll add in that same spot, "and 13 years of inaction by the previous Liberal government, under whose leadership we probably still would not have a softwood lumber agreement".

I know that Mr. Savage is asking for a few minutes to decide on that one, so we can give him that if he needs it. It seems as if we're going to use up the next 25 minutes of committee talking about this again, instead of dealing with employability and poverty, so maybe we can discuss that. I'm always glad to have a conversation about the total inaction by the previous Liberal government.

It's interesting that I heard someone talking earlier—I think someone from the Liberal side—about Mr. Dion's poverty plan. I would note that if we were to follow the Kyoto pattern, Mr. Dion's poverty plan would raise poverty rates by 33% in just a decade. So that's something to look forward to if we ever have to deal with a government led by Mr. Dion.

Let's discuss.

• (1035)

The Chair: I have Ms. Yelich on the list.

Do you want to speak to the subamendment?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I just want to say that I tried, without... because I think it's getting a little ridiculous. The opposition is bringing up these motions and amendments that really don't recognize what the government has done. The government has sat down, with just about every area of the government, and looked at what is necessary, looked at the critical issues. That is why we did put some plans for the forestry industry immediately into place. It ended up being before the budget.

You would have thought that the opposition would be helping us develop some good policies and programs, and maybe some good suggestions for the government through our report, but it looks as if they do not take employability seriously.

I don't know who they speak for when they think the government has not responded, because these programs are starting to become a reality. People are going to start benefiting from them and are benefiting from them.

So for them to suggest that we have done nothing suggests that they want to go into a deficit then. The finance minister has put together numbers, crunched numbers, to make sure that all the sectors....

The Liberals have been in government before, so they do know the competing demands across the board. We talked about child care. We talked about the guaranteed income supplement for seniors. We're trying to address every part of society. Recently it has been the forestry industry. We addressed it immediately, trying to get the targeted initiative for older workers, trying to help these people, as my colleague said, make transitions into other areas in other sectors.

Yesterday, Mr. Chair, you and I were at the sector councils. We heard how excited they are about our employability study. We heard

people here asking us to please.... You know, their needs were never just about coming down and doubling the money for everything without having some focus, having some understanding of what the problems were. Some of it was training, some of it was literacy. This is what we're trying to address through this report.

I think these shenanigans that are going on will only cause more problems for us to complete this study and get some of the issues onto the government's agenda. I do not understand why they want to take us into a deficit. They continually talk about how we now have this looming. They don't want to talk about an economy that's right now doing quite well; they want to start talking about the looming economy that is going to be this downturn, so then we have to accept that.

Maybe we should accept that we don't want to get into more deficits. We do not want to go down a path of a deficit and not pay off our debt. We want to go back into productivity and competitiveness. And this is what all of these programs are about. They're trying to get people back in the workforce. They're more about competitiveness, more about productivity.

So I do not understand why we continually talk about a motion. It's just getting really quite ridiculous, and you know that. I'm just so surprised that we can't get back to the employability study.

Mr. Savage, I really thought that you would add a little more to this meeting than you have, because you.... All of us care about poverty. That's why we wanted to get on the employability study, and can't wait to get on the poverty study. We are supposed to be on that immediately.

If Tony Martin were here today, I think he'd be upset with us to know that his poverty study might not see the light of day.

So I really wish we could go back to that. We have to acknowledge what the government has done, or else we're looking at a.... These people are starting to put us into a deficit, around this table, and we haven't even gotten our employability study done.

• (1040)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Yelich.

I have Mr. Savage and Mr. Lake, on the amended motion.

Mr. Michael Savage: Just to take Ms. Yelich's words to heart, we on this side will commit to vote on the subamendment, the amendment, and the motion without delay if she'll do the same, and we can do 15 minutes of employability today.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Savage.

Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake: That's wonderful, so you can eat up three hours of House time debating this, on a concurrence motion in the House, which has been the pattern over and over and over again.

Actually, I would like to get some clarification from the clerk. As I look at the minutes from the other four committees that have the identical, almost identical, motion before them, it seems to me that one committee has actually voted it down, but there are two committees that have agreed to amended versions of the motion and one that has delayed it. So we have two committees that have already done it.

Could you clarify for me, then, in each of these cases, if we were to vote yes as well, conceivably, could concurrence motions be moved in the House on each of these, so that they could eat up a potential of nine hours of House time in total to deal with pretty much the same issue? Is that correct? Yes.

So nine hours of House time could be eaten up by us, potentially saving all of 19 minutes now in committee, if we address Mr. Savage's suggestion there.

Again, I'd point out that it is very, very clear what this is all about, and it's not about the content of the motion itself. If it were, it would have been moved as one motion in one committee. It's clear that this is simply political. It's simply about obstruction. It's simply about eating up more House time—as we've said, nine hours if we pass this, and potentially 12 hours if the other committee decides to pass the same thing.

I would read here, from the minutes from the international trade meeting, the motion that was amended. It looks as though it reads:

That the Committee recommend that the government introduce as soon as possible an improved aid package for the forestry and manufacturing sectors, including trade measures to support these sectors, to consider the recommendations of the Canadian International Trade Tribunal, to bring Canada's trade laws into line with the United States and the European Union with respect to anti-dumping measures consistent with WTO guidelines, to carry out open and thorough studies on the impact of all ongoing trade negotiations on the manufacturing sector, and report the adoption of this motion to the House at the earliest opportunity.

The motion was amended by replacing the words “to bring” with the words “consider bringing” in the English version only.

And then there was some deletion here. The motion was amended by deleting all the words after the word “sectors”.

So that was one. I don't need to read the whole motion as amended; I'll save the time there. But it's on a similar topic.

Then there's the motion that we had before the natural resources committee, which says:

Given the seriousness of the crisis rocking the forestry sector, that the committee recommend that the government introduce as soon as possible an improved aid package for the forestry sector to diversify forestry economies, which is to be administered by Quebec, the other provinces and the territories, and that a recommendation be reported to the House at the earliest opportunity following the study of the forestry industry.

I won't read the one the finance committee has voted down at this point, but I will read the one that has been delayed now in the industry committee, which is:

That the Committee recommend to the government, in view of the serious crisis in the forestry and manufacturing sectors, that it implement without delay an improved assistance plan for the forestry and manufacturing sectors, including \$500 million to restore Technology Partnerships Canada; \$1.5 billion in reimbursable contributions to allow companies to purchase new equipment; a \$1 billion diversification fund—

• (1045)

The Chair: One second, Mr. Lake.

Ms. Sgro.

Hon. Judy Sgro: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, we have these in front of us. Is there a reason it's necessary to read that out, or has Mr. Lake decided he's going to talk until we don't get a chance to vote? Is

that the intent? Because then I would think he's clearly being obstructionist.

The Chair: That may be the intent, but he does have the floor.

Hon. Judy Sgro: But he is reading what we already have in front of us.

Mr. Mike Lake: I guess, if anything, you could accuse me of being redundant. These are all the same—

Hon. Judy Sgro: You're never redundant.

Mr. Mike Lake: —so maybe you could accuse me of that. But I am reading separate minutes from separate committees. I know it sounds very redundant, because it's pretty similar to the motion we have before us.

I lost my spot there, so maybe I'll start at the beginning again on this one. This is from the industry committee. It says:

That the Committee recommend to the government, in view of the serious crisis in the forestry and manufacturing sectors, that it implement without delay an improved assistance plan for the forestry and manufacturing sectors, including \$500 million to restore Technology Partnerships Canada; \$1.5 billion in reimbursable contributions to allow companies to purchase new equipment; a \$1 billion diversification fund for the forestry industry, to be administered by Quebec and the provinces and allocated among them based according to the size of their forestry industry; and that the adoption of this motion be reported to the House at the earliest opportunity.

This one sounds almost identical to the finance motion, which I will read, actually, because it is interesting that they are almost identical.

The finance motion is the one that was voted down, including by three Liberal members who voted against it and seemed to actually have the interest of Canadians in mind in getting down to the work of the committee. The motion that was moved there was: “That the Committee recommend”—

An hon. member: A point of order.

The Chair: Hold on a second.

We have a point of order from Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Lake is just reading the same thing over and over again. He can do that; it's his right. But if he wanted to read something that actually was relevant to the discussion, I have a copy of Stéphane Dion's speech—

An hon. member: A point of order.

Mr. Michael Savage: —when he introduced the advanced manufacturing prosperity fund. If he's just going to read things over and over, it might be useful to add that to the record, to take us through to 11 o'clock.

An hon. member: Mr. Chair, is that a point of order?

The Chair: I'll actually put you on the list, Mr. Savage, if you want to do that.

Go ahead, Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake: Can you tell me who is on the list right now?

The Chair: The list has Mr. Lake, Ms. Yelich, and I've just added Mr. Savage.

Mr. Mike Lake: Perfect. I look forward to hearing what Mr. Savage has to say.

I'll go back to the beginning of this motion, and it does sound like the same thing over and over again, but I have not yet actually read the same thing at all. I'm reading different motions to different committees.

This one from the finance committee reads:

1) That the Committee recommend to the government, in view of the serious crisis in the forestry and manufacturing sectors, that it implement without delay an improved assistance plan for the forestry and manufacturing sectors, including \$500 million to restore Technology Partnerships Canada; \$1.5 billion in reimbursable contributions to allow companies to purchase new equipment; a \$1 billion diversification fund for the forestry industry, to be administered by Quebec and the provinces and allocated among them based according to the size of their forestry industry; \$1.5 billion in support measures for workers affected by the crisis, including \$60 million for an income support program for senior workers and a \$1.44 billion reserve for the employment insurance fund to be placed in a special fund until an independent fund is created; and that the adoption of this motion be reported to the House at the earliest opportunity.

Again, I would note that this motion is not completely word for word the same as the motion that was brought before us because it has a little more in it, but it actually contains exactly the same words as the original motion put forward by Mr. Lessard, which read:

That the Committee recommend to the government, in view of the serious crisis in the forestry and manufacturing sectors...

I could almost read this by heart now.

...that it implement without delay an improved assistance plan for the forestry and manufacturing sectors, including \$1.5 billion in support measures for workers affected by the crisis, including \$60 million for an income support program for senior workers and a \$1.44 billion reserve for the employment insurance fund to be placed in a special fund until an independent fund is created; and that the adoption of this motion be reported to the House at the earliest opportunity.

As I look at those things, I'm assuming they're all referring to the same thing, which, if I add up the numbers in the finance committee recommendation, it would have been in the neighbourhood of \$5 billion they were talking about spending. If I'm wrong—and somebody can maybe correct me if I'm wrong—and they are actually different motions, then we're actually talking about somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$10 billion to \$15 billion in spending, maybe more in spending on these issues.

If Mr. Lessard gets a chance to clarify that, he could clarify whether we're talking about one motion presented five times to obstruct committee business in five separate committees and potentially eat up 15 hours of House time in concurrence motions, or whether we're actually talking about five completely different motions that would spend in the neighbourhood of \$10 billion, \$15 billion, or maybe \$20 billion of taxpayers' dollars towards this issue. It would be interesting at some point to get some clarification on that if we could.

In terms of the new amended version of the motion, as amended my motion would read:

That the Committee recommend to the government, in view of the serious crisis in the forestry and manufacturing sectors and thirteen years of inaction by the previous Liberal government, under whose leadership we probably still would not have a softwood lumber agreement, that it implement without delay an assistance plan for the forestry and manufacturing sectors, and that the adoption of this motion be reported to the House at the earliest opportunity.

I'm sure the Liberal members of the committee would gladly jump up and support this motion. It really does speak to the problem.

I'm looking forward to hearing from my colleague Mr. Savage when he comes forward to explain his leader's poverty plan. As I mentioned before, if it follows in the Kyoto pattern, it would raise poverty rates by 33% in just a decade. I'm looking forward to hearing his thoughts on that.

Actually, I'm really looking forward to hearing any kind of plan whatsoever. We hear these wonderful pronouncements about these wonderful sounding programs, but we never actually hear anything about a plan to implement those. Maybe we would be talking about raising the GST up to 7% to pay for some of these grandiose plans, as some of the members of the Liberal Party have talked about.

● (1050)

Maybe it will be the cancellation of the corporate tax measures we've announced that will take place over the next five years that will make the Canadian economy the most competitive in the world. Perhaps it will be an increase in personal tax rates. I'm not sure. We don't know yet what it's going to be.

Obviously there will have to be some significant tax increases somewhere along the line to pay for these grandiose plans, because not only has he talked about this unfunded plan to deal with poverty, but there's also the universal child care plan that they've talked about. As we've heard in previous committee meetings, it would cost up to \$20 billion a year if every child under the age of five was put in a program such as that. It will be interesting to hear where the funding is going to come from for plans such as that.

The Chair: Mr. Lake, could I interrupt you for a second? You still have the floor.

We have to call this meeting to an end because another committee will be starting in five minutes. I don't know whether the parties want to discuss some different options to amend this when we get back on Tuesday. I anticipate that you'll want this to be first on the agenda again on Tuesday. I suggest that the parties talk to see if they can come up with something more amenable in terms of the motion.

Mr. Lessard, do you have a comment?

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to put some order in our proceedings, since the Conservatives' intention is clearly to prevent us from deciding this motion so that we can go back to the employability question. At this time, Mr. Chairman, it would be appropriate to suspend our proceedings on this motion so that debate can resume on the same motion on Tuesday morning.

● (1055)

[English]

The Chair: That's exactly what will happen. We will start Tuesday's meeting with this motion again. Once again, I encourage all party members to see if there's some way we can strike out "the thirteen years of Liberal inaction" and maybe "the inaction of the current government" and come to something a little closer.

Anyway, we will start with this motion on Tuesday at 9 o'clock. We will come up with a subcommittee meeting that doesn't correspond to the dates. We'll hopefully have that booked by the end of this afternoon.

Ms. Yelich.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I wonder if we couldn't just give them something to think about on the weekend, if we couldn't insert that. Mr. Savage knows that was a silly....

The Chair: I suggest you two talk about that and come back with something on Tuesday.

Mr. Lessard is next with one final comment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I only have one question of a practical nature, Mr. Chairman. Do you know when you intend to have the subcommittee sit? Will that be tomorrow?

[*English*]

The Chair: No. We'll probably have it in the first part of next week—maybe even Monday, if that's possible. I'll have the clerk call around this afternoon to figure out what can be booked for early next week, or at least before Thursday's meeting.

Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: In light of all the crazy stuff that's been happening in a lot of committees and in Parliament, I want to commend you for arranging the scheduling of this meeting again and for rescheduling the subcommittee. I think that was the right thing to do, and I thank you for it.

The Chair: Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.