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and Social Development and the Status of
Persons with Disabilities**

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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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•(1105)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.)): We're going to start the meeting.

Do you have the letter that was sent to us by the committee assistant addressed to the Honourable Gordon O'Connor, in his capacity as Chief Government Whip, and signed by Mr. Dean Allison, chair of this committee? If you haven't received it, let us know.

I would like to inform you that I have received two letters in my capacity as vice-chair of this committee.

[*English*]

The first letter is from Ian Mass, executive director of Pacific Community Resources, dealing with youth employment skills-linked programming, but the letter was received in English only. I will have it translated into French, and then I'll ask the chair to have it circulated among the members.

It's the same thing for the second letter, which is dated April 22. I don't know whether you got a copy of it, but I got a copy signed by Anne Burns, executive director of the National Association of Career Colleges, also only in English. I will have that letter translated and circulated among members.

Are there any questions about that?

Tony.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Yes, a couple of things.

I got the letter to Mr. O'Connor, and I appreciate it being sent. Had I written it, it would have been a little harder. Nevertheless, I was wondering if there's any further news, and maybe a final listing of the places to which we're going, and the time, so we can all start planning.

I wonder if there's any news back from the whip or from the chair as to when the western swing will be scheduled. I was hoping it would be done before we rise for the summer. I will at some point be making an argument—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Tony, I can't answer your question right away. We do have committee business at the end of this meeting. I'm sorry I brought it up; perhaps I should not have done so. I'll come back to your questions after our guests have left.

Mr. Tony Martin: Okay. And on the committee business, I know that Thursday's meeting is televised. Why isn't today's meeting televised?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Why is today's meeting not televised?

[*Translation*]

It appears that it was the decision of the chair of this committee to televise our meeting on Thursday. To my knowledge, he did not request that that meeting be televised. You know that he is absent at this time. That is why he asked me to chair this meeting. I'm going to ask him the question, and you will have an answer as soon as possible.

With your permission, I would like to defer your questions, unless they are really urgent.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): A point of order, Madam Chair.

We had this discussion before, and it was the recommendation of this committee, as I recall, that we should make every attempt to have all the committee meetings on poverty televised. That was my understanding. So, please, we need to have that discussion. I agree that we need to hear from the witnesses, but....

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you very much.

I will relay your message to the chair. He will give you his own answer on Thursday, because I think he'll be back by then.

I'm sorry about that, but we'll come back to your question, Tony, later on.

Welcome to our guests. You're not going to be big television stars this morning, and I don't know whether that's a good or bad thing, but welcome.

The order of the presentations will be the following: first of all, Madam Law and Mr. Courtneidge,

[*Translation*]

followed by Ms. Armine Yalnizyan, from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Mr. Courtneidge.

[English]

Dr. John Courtneidge (Outreach and Policy, Canada Without Poverty): Chair, in a position like this, I'd like to inform the committee that my honorific is Dr. Courtneidge. Although I'm a Quaker and don't normally use my honorific title, it is probably more appropriate for the public record that it is known.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you so much.

Then Mr. Dennis Howlett, from Make Poverty History, will make his presentation.

Ms. Law and Dr. Courtneidge, who will start the presentation? Ms. Law, will you be followed by Dr. Courtneidge, or will we go directly to Mr. Howlett?

[English]

Ms. Kelly Law (Associate Director, Canada Without Poverty): I will start, followed by my colleague, Dr. Courtneidge.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): You have a total of 10 minutes, which you will share to make your presentation.

[English]

Ms. Kelly Law: That's fine.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Ms. Law, go ahead, please.

[English]

Ms. Kelly Law: Thank you.

Good morning. I'd like to thank the committee for this opportunity on behalf of my colleague, Dr. Courtneidge, and me.

Canada Without Poverty, officially the national anti-poverty organization, is an incorporated, not-for-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to the elimination of poverty in Canada. Founded in 1971 and based in Ottawa, Canada Without Poverty is governed by a board of directors who individually have experienced poverty at some time in their lives.

Our directors span our country from St. John's to Victoria, and from the largest city of Toronto to one of Canada's smallest and most remote communities, the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation village of Old Crow, Yukon. The lived experience of our directors and members informs our mission, vision, values, and work.

Poverty, what Gandhi called the worst form of violence, is an affront to the values of fairness and justice and the inclusion of all persons in Canadian society. Accordingly, we envision poverty's eradication in Canada, not its mere reduction. By promoting poverty eradication as a human rights obligation with reference to Canada's international human rights commitments, we envision eradication being reached through the exercise of political will as well as of corporate social responsibility and community engagement.

•(1110)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I'm sorry, but could you slow down just a bit, please? It's a little difficult for the translators.

Ms. Kelly Law: Sure, I'll do that.

The Universal Periodic Review is a new peer review process via the United Nations Human Rights Council, through which states review the human rights records of other states. In February 2009 the Government of Canada was urged by the UN to address the growing gap between its international human rights obligations and the reality facing vulnerable groups in Canada.

The concerns and recommendations came from a wide range of states participating in the UPR. One central concern is that particularly in light of Canada's affluence, the persistence of extensive poverty, homelessness, and hunger constitute human rights violations that are in need of human rights responses. Accordingly, during the UPR, the UN Human Rights Council has recommended that Canada implement a national poverty eradication strategy that incorporates a human rights framework. It is not only Canada Without Poverty that believes that poverty eradication is possible; so too does a great Canadian, Louise Arbour, the former Supreme Court of Canada justice and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Combating poverty, deprivation, and exclusion is not a matter of charity, and it does not depend on how rich a country is. By tackling poverty as a matter of human rights obligation, the world will have a better chance of abolishing the scourge in our lifetime.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you, Madame Law.

Dr. Courtneidge, please.

[Translation]

Mr. John Courtneidge: I would like to give you my impressions in English because that is my mother tongue. It is English from England.

[English]

Even for Canadians, I accept and understand that my own accent is very difficult at times.

First of all, I'm going to speak to the document that explains my life situation, which has the same title, *My Own Life Situation*. You will be receiving copies of this, as I provided the clerk with 20 copies in English. This was largely written by my wife. It explains how we have lived in poverty for 15 years since I went back to England from Ottawa in 1994. I simply would like to read the last paragraph for you, and I hope the translators can understand my accent.

Since 1994, even though I have a PhD in chemistry and an international reputation as a research chemist, I have been largely unemployed. You could say that I've not really suffered, since one of us already had a job, we've always had a place to live, and there has always been enough food to eat. However, there have never been any extras. Every penny we spend has to be accounted for. We live a hand-to-mouth existence. It's all of this that makes us continually ill.

My wife wrote this for me because she is continuously ill from the stress of our existence—and that's typical of poverty.

I brought two books for the committee to possibly see. The first one is called *The Age of Insecurity*, and the second is called *The Impact of Inequality*.

You are probably aware that income inequality and economic inequality—that segment we call poverty—is at the heart of increasing levels of insecurity and crime worldwide. It's also responsible for the ill health that we see right across societies. If you want one phrase, I would say that poverty is poison; it's literally poison. There are molecules in your bloodstream, even though you may not live in poverty, that are reducing your longevity, increasing the possibility of your being subject to homicide, and increasing your likelihood of illness. That molecule is called cortisol.

I'd like to finish this segment with a short poem called *Let Love Live*.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

Please pardon me for reading these words in English.

[*English*]

If we can live as well as we can be,
if we can do as well as we can do,
if we can live as love asks of us,
all will be well.

Your questions have asked us to provide you with indicators of levels of poverty in Canada. You will be receiving this document, but we can only provide it in English on short notice.

There are two characteristic measures that I'd like to speak to. The first one is what I call the Canadian Tire measure of poverty. You've probably seen on television the kid who goes to the lunch counter looking for a job, and the owner says "You should be playing hockey", and the kid says, "Well, that's why I'm here". The Canadian Tire measure—unofficially, of course—is that one-third of children live in poverty in Canada, and likewise their families.

The stronger indicator of poverty that's accepted worldwide is the Gini coefficient. It's worth looking at this on the Internet; even the much-vilified Wikipedia has a section on the Gini coefficient. That's the coefficient both the United Nations and the "Criminal Intelligence Agency" use, because the CIA knows that inequality and poverty lead to crime, violence, and war—as Hugh Segal pointed out in his Gow lecture on Friday night. We have that data, which we can share with you.

I'll hand my turn over to my colleague.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you, Dr. Courtneidge. Is that the end of your presentation? There is one minute and 40 seconds left.

Dr. John Courtneidge: I'll hand it back to my colleague, Kelly Law.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Ms. Law, go ahead.

Ms. Kelly Law: Thank you very much.

Millions of Canadians aspire to a life free from poverty—the hungry, the homeless, and the disenfranchised, the working poor, the unemployed, and the socially assisted, the aboriginal, the immigrant, and the person of colour, the person with disabilities, the parent, the pensioner.

In support of these aspirations, a number of organizations from various sectors are mobilized in a multi-year, multi-partner, non-partisan campaign, the Dignity for All campaign. This campaign's vision is to make a poverty-free and more socially secure Canada a reality by 2020. The conviction behind this campaign is that Canadians must respect and defend the rights of every person to live with dignity.

Two principal goals of our campaign are, first, a comprehensive federal plan for poverty elimination; and second, a federal act to eliminate poverty, to promote social inclusion, and strengthen social security.

In closing, we wish to underscore that poverty renders an unacceptable cost to all Canadians, due to the well-known connection between poverty and health care costs, poverty and criminal justice outcomes, and poverty and diminished workplace productivity. Canadians thus have a profound self-interest in seeing poverty reduced and eventually eliminated. A poverty-free Canada will be a healthier, safer, more just, and more prosperous Canada.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you very much. You must have timed your presentation, because you're well within the time.

I just want to remind you, Dr. Courtneidge, that if you give your English text to our clerk, we will have it translated and circulated among the members.

Secondly, you needn't apologize for speaking in English. There are two official languages in this country, and one of them is English.

Thank you.

Dr. John Courtneidge: Thank you for that, Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Mr. Howlett.

Mr. Dennis Howlett (Coordinator, Make Poverty History): Thank you very much for this opportunity to share in the important work you're doing at this committee.

I want to start by saying how much we appreciate that this committee has taken up this study. We wish you all the best.

There are more than one billion people who live on less than a dollar a day, and half of the world's population are living on less than two dollars a day. There are more than three million Canadians living in poverty. Depending on what measure you use, between 10.5% and 11.9% of Canadians are poor. One in four first nations children live in poverty, and the unemployment rate in first nations communities is four times the national average.

It doesn't have to be this way. Collectively we now have the resources, the technology, and the knowledge necessary to end poverty, both globally and here at home. We need a plan to make poverty history, both globally and in Canada—and for aboriginal peoples.

There is a global plan to reduce extreme poverty, by the year 2015, by half. It's called the "millennium development goals".

Where there are democratic governments in place that have made this a priority, where debts have been cancelled, and where efficient aid is available, progress is being made. Even though it is now being threatened by the global economic crisis and by climate change, and we're in danger of reversing that progress, the evidence is there that implementing a plan where you have goals and timetables can work.

I believe success in domestic poverty reduction also requires that we have a plan with a legislated mandate, targets, and timetables. That is why from the time of its inception in 2005, the Make Poverty History campaign in Canada has been calling for the federal government to involve groups where poverty is predominant, such as aboriginal people, women, minorities, and youth, in the design and implementation of a domestic poverty reduction strategy.

The governments of Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, and most recently Nova Scotia, which represent a whole range of political parties and ideologies, have taken the lead in developing comprehensive poverty reduction strategies. Significant progress in reducing poverty is already evident in Quebec and Newfoundland.

Provincial governments do not have jurisdiction over all the policy tools required to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty. That is why governments, at all levels, including federal, provincial, territorial, municipal, and aboriginal, need to be engaged. But leadership from the federal government is needed to engage all levels of government in the development of a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy for all of Canada.

Poverty reduction strategies need to include a wide range of social and economic policies, including community economic development and job creation strategies, education and training programs, tax policies, as well as improvements to social programs. The point is that it's not just social programs or welfare; a whole range of measures are necessary.

• (1120)

Some of the things the federal government can do include raising the child tax benefit to \$5,100 per child; implementing a national housing strategy; implementing a national child care and early childhood education program; improving the employment insurance program, which is very urgent—and Armine will say more about that in a minute; reinstating a federal minimum wage and setting it at an above-the-poverty-line level; ensuring a greater role for non-profit

organizations, social enterprises, and cooperatives in economic development and job creation; creating a national pharmacare plan; implementing the Kelowna accord or a comparable plan to narrow the living gap between aboriginal people and the rest of Canada; increasing the guaranteed income supplement; and creating a poverty reduction fund to support provincial initiatives.

Investment in poverty reduction and supporting participation in the labour market through positive incentives will yield many economic and social benefits, including boosting productivity, improving population health, lowering the costs of health care, reducing crime and the costs of incarceration, and boosting the labour market supply to help address the labour shortages that could arise down the road as a result of an aging workforce.

Finally, I want to say a few things about the tax system and what it can and cannot do in terms of helping to make poverty history.

While there are some tax measures that can be a useful part of a poverty reduction strategy, tax measures on their own are not a very effective way of achieving poverty reduction. Tax measures can be a component. Some good examples would be the working income tax benefit, which has been in the last couple of budgets. That's a good thing, but a word of caution: it doesn't fully deal with the cost of moving off welfare and taking a job in the low-income sector. It would be much better to also have a national pharmacare plan, because that's one of the major barriers to people moving off welfare, especially people who need prescription drugs. The Newfoundland government, for example, invested in a pharmacare plan as a way to reduce the barriers for people moving off welfare. Ultimately, they have lowered their costs because they have fewer people left on welfare. So that's a smart strategy.

Similarly, if we don't have an above-the-poverty-line minimum wage, a working income tax benefit can actually just subsidize inadequate levels of income.

Tax measures need to be designed very carefully if they are to contribute to poverty reduction goals. A good case in point is the difference between the child tax benefit and the child tax credit. The child tax credit, announced in the 2007 budget, while providing a modest benefit to families with children who had taxable income, did absolutely nothing for the poorest children whose families have no taxable income at all. It will cost about \$1.5 billion a year when fully implemented. It would have been far better to have applied this funding to improving the Canada child tax benefit and the national child benefit supplement, which do provide assistance to a broad range of families. But it provides more benefit to those in greatest need, including those with no taxable income.

I just want to add to that. Did you know that if you experienced poverty as a child, even if later in life you escape poverty, that is more of a predictor of heart disease than whether you smoke or not? Child poverty is an urgent need to really address that scourge, because it has long-term implications.

Finally, I would conclude that tax cuts are generally not a good way to reduce poverty because often tax cuts are unfair. Much more of the benefits of tax cuts in the last few years have gone to the rich. In fact, in the 2006 budget the tax cuts were 12 times as much of a benefit for families with an income of over \$100,000 a year than for those with an income of \$15,000 a year.

Tax cuts are also often ineffective. Not many child care spaces were created as a result of the child care spaces initiative in the 2006 budget, and RESPs and RRSPs do not work so well in terms of the goal if the goal is to make education more accessible or reduce seniors' poverty.

• (1125)

Finally, tax cuts reduce the options by reducing the amount of money the government has available to invest in social programs and economic stimulation programs that would have a more direct and effective result.

Thank you very much.

• (1130)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you very much, Mr. Howlett, for keeping to your time schedule.

I'll ask Madame Yalnizyan now to present her paper.

[Translation]

Ms. Armine Yalnizyan (Senior Economist, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives): Thank you, Madam Chair. It is a pleasure for me to be here today. I'm going to speak in English.

[English]

I want to say that if I were giving this presentation to your committee six months or a year ago, it would be categorically a different tone from the one I want to use today. I can scarcely underscore enough the urgency with which you meet today to do something about poverty prevention.

You're here to discuss poverty reduction strategies. I want to salute the Member of Parliament from the Soo, Tony Martin, as well as Mike Savage. I want to salute Senator Segal, who has addressed himself to this topic, and the leader of the Bloc Québécois, who has been unremitting in his discussion of the need to fix the unemployment insurance system in this country to be able to prevent massive poverty. And I would like to salute the Senate committees that have talked about rural poverty, urban poverty, poverty among the aged, as well as poverty as a social determinant of health.

The Parliament of Canada has been doing much work to discuss the importance of poverty in the run-up to the recession. Today, you have to actually roll up your sleeves and provide leadership on how we do something about it, not simply talk about it any more.

Let me tell you why I think this is so important. We have said now for over 15 years in this country, maybe 20 years, that the best social

policy in this country is a job. What happens when the jobs dry up? Tomorrow we will be releasing through the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives a report that shows that this recession is the deepest of any recession that has hit us since the 1930s. The job losses in the opening months of this recession outstrip anything we saw in the 1981-1982 recession or the 1990-1991 recession. We are also more exposed as Canadians to high levels of household debt, which are higher than at any point on record, rates of savings that look more like the late 1930s than anything we've seen since, and an unemployment insurance system that is so stripped back it looks like the 1940s.

We are completely unprepared to deal with the magnum force of what is going to happen in terms of the job losses coming down the pike. Today's unemployment insurance numbers show that the number of claims that were put forward in front of the EI commission this month are the highest at any time since the system was stripped back. We had, I believe, 325,000 claims this month. We haven't seen anything like it since we changed the EI system, with the last round of changes being in 1996.

I want to say that those jobs that are being lost in the hundreds of thousands—and will continue to accelerate in the coming months if this recession is anything like what we've seen previously—will add the *nouveau* poor to the *déjà* poor.

You know as well as I do that how you count poverty determines how many people you can say are poor. Pick a measure, any measure. The most common measure is the low-income cut-off. Using that measure, we have about 3.5 million Canadians who fall under the low-income cut-off. Regrettably, this now starts to include the working poor, after a ten-year blockbuster juggernaut of job creation in Canada, Canada having outpaced every other G-7 nation in terms of job creation in the last decade. So that has not managed to actually eliminate poverty, though poverty has been cut dramatically in the last ten years.

I want to say that Canadians need your help and need it quickly. There are 300 or so parliamentarians in the House of Commons. Only you can change the unemployment insurance system to help protect Canadians in the event of job loss. What we have right now is six out of ten unemployed Canadians who have no access to jobless benefits. In the last recession, it was only two out of ten Canadians.

I don't know what kinds of things have to happen to people in terms of running through their savings, selling what assets they have, and looking for cheaper places to live, which is in very short supply, unless you're prepared to act. We are looking at a massive wave of economic dislocation, a disaster in the making that is utterly preventable.

I hope I have made with some force my sense of urgency that you consider very seriously, as part of poverty prevention, things that you could do today, things that do not require an act, do not require long-term thinking but can prevent poverty today, so that when you do get around to doing something about poverty reduction, you're not starting from a higher level of poverty.

If the government's number one job is anything in a time of recession, it is to stop the decline. That is something that absolutely you can do. The government has acted with great haste to back up the banks, by providing \$125 billion for the banks and CMHC to protect mortgages.

• (1135)

There are also 32% of Canadians who live in rental housing, and when they lose their jobs, they are just as likely to lose where they live. We need to be thinking very seriously about what we can do on the housing side as well, in this recession, to prevent, as I say, an unnecessary and utterly preventable wave of economic dislocation, the likes of which we will not have seen since the 1930s.

We are here to discuss poverty reduction. I'm an economist, and I want to raise a point about the costs of poverty should you do nothing. The Ontario Association of Food Banks put out a document that was co-authored in part with contributions from Don Drummond, the chief economist from the Toronto Dominion Bank. That document showed that the poverty-related cost in Ontario alone for health care costs strictly connected to the treatment of poor people was \$2.9 billion. Lost production in the province of Ontario was between 5.5% and 6.5% of GDP because of poverty, which amounts to \$25 billion to \$30 billion, and lost revenues to both the federal and the provincial public purse were in the order of \$4 billion to \$6 billion. So you see, there is a real cost to not addressing poverty. Forget about the human costs; there is a macro cost to it.

We are an aging society, and I think it is to our great shame that of all the demographics in this country, of all the rates of poverty, the rate of child poverty is the highest. I have to say that we in Canada have made the most progress, not only in the last decade but in the last several decades, on reducing the poverty among those over the age of 65. Child poverty remains stubbornly high. In 1989 there was a unanimous declaration by parliamentarians in this place to say that child poverty was an affront in a nation that is as rich as Canada. Canada, by the way, is still the ninth-largest economy on the surface of the planet, with a fraction of the population. We are an aging population, and we can ill afford to dismiss 11% of the children who will be supporting us, in this room, in 15 to 20 years' time.

It is time to deal with child poverty. And I just want to say that when you look at poverty rates across Canada, using the measure I'm using consistently—the low-income cut-off of Statistics Canada—you will see great variation among jurisdictions, and you will see great variation among jurisdictions for different demographic groups.

It has already been mentioned that the greatest progress in reducing poverty in this country has been in Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador. That happened for child poverty. Quebec reduced child poverty by 22.4%, down to 9.7%, in the space of ten years. That's pretty impressive. In Newfoundland and Labrador an 18.2% rate of child poverty went down to 9.3%.

Newfoundland and Labrador has a seniors' rate of poverty of 2.3%. Quebec, which has seen such a dramatic rate of decline in seniors' poverty, has a 9.3% rate of poverty among seniors. There's huge variation from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, which tells us that poverty reduction is not just contingent on an economy, because if you're reducing child poverty or senior poverty it's not because the best social policy is a job. We're doing something, other than requiring people to work, to reduce poverty.

The second thing that I have to say is that it's not contingent on economic growth, because some of these jurisdictions achieved very strong rates of economic growth and others did not. So there is something to be said about the “yes, we can” principle. Yes, we can reduce poverty—but will we?

I have left with the clerk of the committee our stimulus package, which the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives helps co-author. Every year we do an alternative federal budget, which is a coalition process. This year, in early January, we floated a stimulus package. A number of measures were adopted by the Conservative government, and there's still room to move to prevent further poverty and to actually stimulate the economy, which will have to happen in the coming months.

I want to say that in the three-week period from late September to mid-October, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives contracted with Environics to do a national poll of what people's perception of poverty was and how you could reduce poverty. This is precisely the time when we were having a federal election and when the economic storm was hitting North America and the world. In the midst of this recession, across the country from coast to coast, irrespective of political stripe, 77% of Canadians said the recession is the best time to deal with poverty-reduction measures. This is exactly the time at which we all have the same risk in common.

• (1140)

In the 1930s, what propelled us out of that was “there but for the grace of God go I”. We need protections for us all. We need social insurance for us all. That gave rise to the unemployment insurance system in the first place.

Today we see we are in a similar position. So I ask you, please, there is no time to waste and there is broad consensus on how we can change EI reform and how we can protect Canadians in the eye of the economic storm. This disaster in the making is utterly avoidable, and we call on you, our elected representatives, to make the difference for all of us.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you, Madame Yalnizyan, for this very impassioned but also very logical and very serious presentation.

Thank you to all of you.

We'll now go to the questions. For the Liberal side, I'll start with Madame Minna, and you have seven minutes, question and answer together.

Madame Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

And thank you, all of you, for your presentations, and those eloquent words.

I've said before that part of my frustration is of course that I've been around this block, as many of us have been. We've discussed this issue, and Madame Yalnizyan and I have had long discussions with respect to women and poverty and so on. I agree with everything that's been said. I think if we sat down with the solutions, we'd probably agree on all of them.

Given the emergency and the situation we're living with right now, we obviously need to establish a national anti-poverty strategy. There's no question of that in my mind, so that's a given. So the only question I have right now is, as we're in the process of doing that, what would be the immediate things we could be doing to address some of the issues immediately, like today and tomorrow?

EI comes to mind for me as one, and the increasing of the child tax benefit is the other that could be done immediately. I'm sure you have others. Could you maybe put some of those on the table? Some of us might start pushing and working for those immediate things. Two of them I've mentioned. You may have a couple of others we could do as we then develop and restructure the whole of it.

That's my only question, because I have no disagreement with any of what was said. And then I have a whole lot I could add to that as well.

Ms. Kelly Law: I'll just briefly start off the answer to this question and then my colleague Dr. John Courtney will finish off.

We strongly believe that an immediate solution to this could be the creation of a poverty commissioner, followed by the creation of a poverty-focused office with staff who focus on the issue of looking towards a poverty reduction strategy. This is something that won't take any time. It is an immediate solution. It can be for a short term.

John, I'll turn it over to you to carry on.

Dr. John Courtney: I think Ms. Minna wants to respond.

Hon. Maria Minna: Yes, I'm sorry. I've had ideas with respect to a commissioner, and I know that would take time.

In addition to that, which would help us establish a strategy, I'm looking for immediate measures that we could take to address some of the urgent issues and then start working on a strategy as well. We need to do a two-track thing at this point, given the situation we're living with.

Dr. John Courtney: Yes, indeed, and the first quick point that we can do is to understand how the problem occurs and look at the

five-mechanism model for poverty: theft, rent, interest, profit, and unequal pay for work. And then recognize that Canadians, people worldwide, need an as-of-right base income.

This committee could well re-examine its involvement in the Mincome initiative in Manitoba in the 1970s.

I was at the Gow lecture that Hugh Segal gave on Friday evening. You will know that he is a passionate supporter of—in his terminology—a negative income tax or a guaranteed annual income. For me, it's assistance income. The reason I say this is that I am now a Canadian citizen, as of February, so I have two nationalities, two citizenships. And if we want Canadians to be active citizens in their own jurisdiction, we need to give them the resources. And a citizen's income would be the way to do that. So within 12 months I hope this committee will constitute a panel and hear on that.

I also have in front of me a petition that has been signed by 300 people online, and this combines the notion that we should refresh all of the income supplement programs for working-age adults—EI and so on—as well as introducing this citizen's income or guaranteed annual income idea.

• (1145)

Hon. Maria Minna: And the others?

Dr. John Courtney: I could provide this if you wish.

Mr. Dennis Howlett: In terms of the measures that could be taken right away, I would say that in addition to employment insurance, which is the top priority, and raising the child tax benefit—and again, the system is already in place, so it really doesn't take much to raise it, and it would deliver the assistance to those who need it most—the other one would be a national housing strategy.

There was the beginning of that; I think we must give credit to the last budget. There was money for retrofitting a lot of the stock of social housing, but not very much at all for building new affordable housing. That needs to be improved, and we need money for building new affordable housing as well. This is something that the federal government can play a role in and help to make it possible.

Hon. Maria Minna: Could we, in the short term, subsidize individuals as opposed to units? It will take time—

Mr. Dennis Howlett: I'm concerned that there is a real shortage of available affordable housing, so just subsidizing it may not be good enough.

Hon. Maria Minna: We need both, but I'm saying in the interim, to make sure there is more—

Mr. Dennis Howlett: Yes.

Hon. Maria Minna: Okay. Sorry.

Ms. Yalnizyan.

Ms. Armine Yalnizyan: I would like to just reinforce that there are specific things we can do. There is wide consensus that to have a uniform entrance rate of 360 hours across the country would let a lot more people in from the storm. Similarly, benefit levels are quite low at 55%. As the report that I'm releasing tomorrow will show, a large number of women cannot live on 55% of their earnings.

In the past we have had variable levels of benefits. We started off the UI program in 1942 with seven different categories of benefit receipts, from as low as 33% to as high as 75%, and with rates for dependants. We can fix the EI system to support families that have dependants so that they are not in poverty at 55% of whatever their previous rate of earnings was.

Similarly, Dennis has spoken of some of the measures in the last budget to support housing. The budget also announced that housing would be receiving \$1.1 billion in the spreads between what the banks held as mortgages and what could be saved with the lower interest rate that the federal government offered.

The stimulus package that we put forward said we should use all of that money, \$1.1 billion, and help cities across this country buy affordable housing stock. There is a glut of condos that are not moving. The prices are just going to fall for the condo developers, and they are in the hottest markets across the country, where just a few months ago there was a real hue and cry for affordable housing.

The Prime Minister himself said that there are deals to be had in this recession and, indeed, this is the time to purchase a stock of already built affordable housing with the money that we are getting in helping the banks.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you.

Madame Beaudin.

[Translation]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Thank you very much, Madame Chair.

Good morning and welcome to all of you. What you say is absolutely extraordinary. I can also understand your impatience in wanting an anti-poverty plan. You're right: fighting poverty is economically more cost-effective than trying to resolve its devastating effects on our society. I come from Quebec, which has had a framework law for this purpose since 2002. We're seeing its positive effects on measures.

Ms. Yalnizyan, you said there were differences, gaps between the provinces. What could the federal government's contribution be, in view of those gaps between the provinces?

• (1150)

Ms. Armine Yalnizyan: Thank you, Mr. Beaudin. I forwarded to the clerk a document that—

[English]

Sorry, I can't do this in French. I was going to try.

I left a document with the clerk saying that when we were designing the stimulus package we indicated that we felt the federal government had a leadership role to play in EI, in housing, on the

GST refundable tax credit, and in WITB. There's a number of things the federal government can do without the provinces, but the provinces are where there have been the most dramatic commitments to poverty reduction, particularly in Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, and now Ontario. It looks like Manitoba is coming onstream. It looks like Nova Scotia is contemplating something. There is some momentum.

In our stimulus package, we said that we believed the federal government had a supporting role to help those provinces that are moving forward, much as the federal government did in the 1960s with social assistance, with cost-shared programs. This would be a conditional cost-shared transfer. It's outlined in some depth in the document I have left with the clerk of the committee, who is getting it translated. You will have it in your hands. I'd be happy to answer any specific questions about the nature of that transfer.

[Translation]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: That's indeed the document that we received.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): No. The document is in English only, and I can't distribute it.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: All right, we haven't yet received it.

[English]

Dr. John Courtney: The federal government could also be involved in expanding the social economy and the solidarity economy, to follow the lead of Quebec.

One of the key ways of doing this is to look at the way the banking system operates here in Canada. It's the case that ten cents out of every dollar of Ontario taxes goes to simply servicing the provincial debt. People from other jurisdictions will know their own figures.

It is perfectly possible for the Bank of Canada to operate an interest-free revolving loan fund for the creation of affordable housing and the development of the social economy and the solidarity economy. So these are specific federal acts that could be done to facilitate the social and solidarity economy and introduce, through the Bank of Canada, an interest-free loan fund to develop social housing and other green infrastructure.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Madame Beaudin.

[Translation]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Mr. Courtney, you spoke about certain measures, including the measure to increase the child tax benefit to \$5,100. Is that correct? How did you determine that amount?

[English]

Dr. John Courtney: That figure was probably provided by Dennis.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Mr. Howlett.

Mr. Dennis Howlett: That amount would mostly eliminate child poverty. There have been annual increases over the years, but now they have stopped. It's time now for the government to decide to continue to increase the child tax benefit to get it to a level where it could reduce child poverty to almost nothing.

These figures were put forward by Campaign 2000, the coalition against child poverty in Canada.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): You have some time left, Ms. Beaudin.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: You talked about consensus. When we talk about the employment insurance program as a whole, this is a measure that can be implemented quickly and that does not require an act. Making this program more accessible would already make it possible to take action against poverty.

Do you all agree with that?

[English]

Mr. Dennis Howlett: Definitely.

Ms. Armine Yalnizyan: I believe you do need legislative changes. I don't think you can do it simply through regulations, but I may be incorrect. That's why it has to be a parliamentary process. The budget bill was very specific about how the Employment Insurance Act was changed to accommodate the extension of benefits. That was extremely welcome, but I think other changes require changes to the legislation, which may not make them quite as quick as regulatory changes. But it's for the clerk to decide if there is space within the regulatory regime, rather than going through the legislative route.

• (1155)

[Translation]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: I was thinking especially of abolishing the waiting period. If we abolish that period and maintain the five weeks at the end, we would be offering workers seven weeks. Is that a measure that suits you?

[English]

Dr. John Courtney: Yes, and the hours requirements should also be reviewed. This is the big stumbling block. I know from personal experience. I'm a seasonal worker during the summer in a garden centre—I used to co-own a nursery and garden centre in England—and you can't work the number of hours in seasonal work, certainly in Ontario, that enable you to access EI. EI should be a much more universal system, so that when people are in need they are able to access those funds straight-away. Most of us live literally a hand-to-mouth existence, and no income equals no food.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you, Dr. Courtney.

I will now go to Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: Thank you very much.

Thanks to all of you for the tremendous work you do and for being here this morning. You certainly have very valuable information for all of us to consider as we try to put together a proposal for the federal government that will get them into the poverty strategy game again.

A couple of you mentioned the issue of political will and the need for political will if this is going to happen. Armine makes a great plea for immediate action. We all know that there needs to be immediate action plus a long-term plan that will take us out of this recession and forward with some confidence that nobody will be left behind.

How do we marshal the political forces? We're going out now as a committee over the next couple of months to eastern Canada and a couple of big cities—Montreal and Toronto—to hear from people about poverty. Now we may come in and come out under the radar. Who knows? Dealing with an issue, as Armine has said, that is so front of mind for so many people.... Even those who still have jobs are looking over their shoulders wondering what if and what's there if they don't.

How do we mobilize the political forces in the very near future to get behind an effort by our committee and the government, ultimately, to make the changes required?

Mr. Dennis Howlett: The Make Poverty History campaign has over 250,000 people who have signed up in support of our campaign. We have an online network. I'm sure you've received emails from Make Poverty History supporters, because we have supporters in every riding across the country.

I think even pollsters have commented on the change in public opinion. It used to be that people in Canada thought the poor were a small minority, and they didn't need to worry about them because they themselves were safe. That is no longer the case. People are concerned. The economic crisis has created broader public support for doing something about poverty.

The other thing that has changed is that as we have tried to get across a positive message that poverty can be eliminated both globally and in Canada, people have supported that idea. They realize that it's the smart thing to do. We have to get away from thinking of poverty in terms of welfare and as a bottomless pit and that it will always be there. It can be eliminated.

Quebec and Newfoundland have shown a smart way of actually removing the barriers and preventing people from falling so deeply into poverty that it's hard to climb out. Having the employment insurance safety net there, having day care available to people, and having pharmacare available to people has actually reduced the number of people living in poverty by providing a positive way out. And that has reduced the costs for government, not only in the welfare bill but in health care, incarceration, and other things. So they have the money to pay for the investments that are necessary.

I will concede that it requires an upfront investment. You have to come up with the political will to put the investment up front, but it will pay off big time. Not only will it save government money, it will increase tax revenue and boost the economy. The best way to increase productivity is not to give more money to the high-tech sector. It is already highly productive. The most bang for your buck will come from investing in training and education and stimulation at the low end of the economy, where it's the least productive. That's where you have the most to gain. So it makes sense economically. I would argue that it also is imperative morally that we do something about poverty. Wherever you come from, I think we can all agree that everyone in Canada has a lot to gain from reducing poverty.

• (1200)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Go ahead, Dr. Courtneidge.

Dr. John Courtneidge: On your trip down home, as we maritimers would call it, there are two groups that I think you should try to meet with. The first are the editorial boards of the regional newspapers, the *Chronicle Herald* and the other newspaper boards down home. The other group are those within the universities, including the students. The fourth part of the four-point plan I've just outlined: a federal anti-poverty act or poverty abolition act, a poverty commissioner, who you could in fact appoint on an interim basis before the act is put in place. The cost would be minimal—\$1 million annually, or something like that, for an interim poverty commissioner. Then, of course, the Senate will be bringing forward its green paper, and we are encouraging you to look at this citizens income idea. So I'd recommend those two conversation groups, the editorial boards and those within the universities.

The key point they need to know concerns this elastic-band point. This elastic band represents an unequal society. The stress is felt right throughout that society. If you go to Nova Scotia, for example, with an increasingly large senior population, if you reduce income inequality and in fact create an inclusive society, you dramatically reduce health care costs. In B.C., the argument across on the other coast is that the provincial budget will go completely over the top because of the increasing health care costs. There will be no money for roads, or transit, or police, or education; it will simply be covered up that way.

So I'm saying editorial boards, and I would try to meet with the principals and students in the east coast universities.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you.

Madame Yalnizyan.

Ms. Armine Yalnizyan: I think you'll get political will as people start losing their mortgages and losing their pensions and suddenly all the progress we've made on poverty reduction among the over-65s balloons out of control: public pensions, and improving GIS, OAS, or CPP, doing something about the fact that universally people are not protected and there's going to be a real spike-up. The biggest proportion of people working right now are those over 55 and over 65. They're small proportions of the population, but people are going back to work because they can't survive on their pensions.

I don't think you need to build up political will; I think the stories are going to come to you, and people are going to demand that you

act. That's what they put you in this place for in the first place. Help us.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you.

We'll now go to the government, to Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I certainly appreciate your presentation and the passion with which you present it.

Mr. Howlett indicated earlier that really it's a question of how you apply funding in putting it to use for those who need it the most. It's always a question of how big your pot of funding is and then where you should apply that funding. I agree with Armine Yalnizyan that having a job is probably a good first step.

The government has done a number of things; for instance, the national child benefit, an investment of about \$3.6 billion. The Canada child tax credit together with the national child benefit amounts to about \$9.4 billion. I would take it that's a good investment of dollars. The government recently has increased the amount you can earn before the child tax benefit is cut off. Those are good steps. Would you agree with me?

• (1205)

Mr. Dennis Howlett: The problem is that the child tax credit is not available to the poorest families. That's the problem I was pointing to.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I was speaking about the Canada child tax benefit and the national child benefit, which together are about \$9.4 billion. Is that a good investment?

Mr. Dennis Howlett: The problem is that the child tax credit part of it is not available to the poorest families. The child tax benefit has been a good program, but I wish the additional money that was put into the child programs had been put into the existing child tax benefit, because then it would have been accessible to the poorest families.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I gather from listening to what you're saying that it's sort of a multi-faceted approach. That's one area. The other area is housing. And of course most recently there's been an announcement to extend \$1.9 billion over five years for housing and homelessness programs. Would you say that is a good initiative? Perhaps more money is needed, but is it going in the right direction?

Mr. Dennis Howlett: Yes, and I already commented on that. It is welcomed. The one missing thing is there's not much money for building new housing. Most of it is dedicated to retrofitting, which is urgently needed, as well, so that's welcome.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: On top of that \$1.9 billion over five years, there is of course in the budget an additional \$1 billion for renovations and energy retrofits. That would be a good thing.

Mr. Dennis Howlett: That's right, yes.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: On housing for seniors, another \$400 million over two years—that's a direct investment. That would be an appropriate investment of dollars. And of course for persons with disabilities it would be another positive aspect. For aboriginals and people living in the north, there's another \$600 million, money going in the right direction, according to what I hear you say.

Then we come to employment insurance, which is really an insurance program funded by employers and employees, and as you expand the program, of course, the premiums would rise. Now, given the state of the economy, of course, and the fact that things are difficult to begin with, the government has chosen to freeze the premium rates to both employers and employees and allow for greater benefit coverage and extended benefit coverage to the tune of \$4.5 billion. Would you agree with me that that's a positive step?

Mr. Dennis Howlett: Yes, but again—

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: You may think it should be more than \$4.5 billion, I gather, but, again, it's a question of how much money do you have and where do you put it. Now, you're saying \$4.5 billion is good, but you'd like to see it doubled or tripled.

Mr. Dennis Howlett: There are a number of things that need to be done to fix the employment insurance. A few things got fixed, but I would say the most important things did not get fixed. The most important thing is that these benefits be available to more Canadians falling into unemployment.

The reason is, if you fall into unemployment and are not able to get employment insurance, you have to sell off all your assets and sink down to a really low level of supported welfare, from which it is much more difficult to climb back out.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Are you suggesting, then, that the premiums be increased or that the government inject additional billions of dollars?

Mr. Dennis Howlett: Well, there is still some room in the premiums. There was a large surplus. I know that's going to get eaten down pretty quickly in this current economic crisis, but yes, I think it's more important to ensure more people have access to employment insurance. That's the most urgent thing that needs to be done, and that was not fixed in the recent budget.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: The other one is getting a job, ensuring people get skilled and trained for new jobs. The total expenditure with the federal-provincial agreements is \$8.3 billion. I take it you would say that's a good investment.

• (1210)

Mr. Dennis Howlett: Yes, the training part of the budget was actually quite good, quite welcome.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: When the EI benefits were expanded to include an additional \$1 billion to allow for extended training on top of \$1.95 billion, was that a good initiative?

Mr. Dennis Howlett: Yes, I've already said the training components have been good.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: From consulting with people across the country, they were indicating that if you were going to apply roughly \$1 billion somewhere with respect to either eliminating the two-week waiting period or extending the benefits for those who have been off the job market for longer by adding five weeks, the preference seemed to be to add the \$1 billion to extending the benefits by five weeks, as opposed to dealing with it in a two-week waiting period.

Do you agree with most Canadians on that?

Mr. Dennis Howlett: No, that's the one I would disagree with.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Now, I have here a comment by our former Bank of Canada governor, David Dodge, who said, with respect to the two-week waiting period:

...there's a lot of churn in the labour market, just normal churn. ... That two weeks is there for a very good reason. ... Moreover, many of the people that are being laid off get some sort of bridge payment through that period. So that's not where the real issue is. The real issue is that some of these people are going to be off work for a rather long period of time....

That's where the need is, and that's where it should be applied.

Do you disagree with him?

Mr. Dennis Howlett: I would disagree with that.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Perhaps you can use somebody else's time to answer my colleagues a little bit more fully on your disagreement.

We're on the second round now.

Mr. Savage, you have five minutes for the questions and answers.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I want to reiterate how disappointing it is that this meeting isn't being publicly broadcast. We have some of the leaders in the anti-poverty movement in Canada appearing today, coming forward with very passionate presentations. This is really what this study is all about, and it's disappointing that it's not more widely seen.

Having said that, I want to thank you for coming. Groups like the CCPA have been a big part of our social policy landscape in Canada for a long time, and Make Poverty History, of course, both domestically and a quick tip of the hat to the work internationally. We'll keep the pressure on John McKay's bill on corporate social responsibility. You'll help us with that one, I hope. And of course there's Canada Without Poverty.

I want to go to the issue of taxes. You mentioned, Mr. Howlett, in your presentation about the 2006 tax cuts in the first budget of the Conservative government, how they don't necessarily assist those most in need. We had a budget in 2009 that was billed as a budget to provide stimulus and to particularly assist those who need help the most. According to the Caledon Institute, if somebody has \$150,000 in income, which is most of the people around this table, a two-earner couple with two kids gets \$483 in savings and a single parent with one child gets nothing out of this budget. So we still don't seem to quite be there. We're not getting it.

Sometimes you hear about people saying you reduced taxes. I used to hear, not so much recently, fortunately, from the Conservative side that reducing the GST was this great thing for poor people because they don't pay other taxes. But we have mechanisms. We have the GST rebate, which I think the CCPA had suggested doubling, as opposed to tax cuts that are widely spread out and assist people who make more money or certainly assist them equally. So you have that measure. You have the child tax benefit, to which you've referred. You've talked about the importance of that versus the child tax credit.

I want to get a comment from each of you about the idea that combatting poverty is complicated. It seems to me that a lot of mechanisms exist right now that just need to be fixed. They don't need to be reinvented. EI is one of them, the child tax benefit, the GIS. Do you agree with me that we have the mechanisms in Canada, and if we really wanted to combat poverty right now, a large part of that infrastructure exists, it just needs to be enabled?

Ms. Armine Yalnizyan: It's quite clear we have the mechanisms in place, because, as I mentioned to you, different jurisdictions have cut various rates of poverty in half. What we need is the federal government to step up to the plate and be a partner in this poverty reduction measure and take leadership in the areas in which they have unique jurisdiction. We've outlined some of those this morning.

I think, without question, absolutely, you can reduce poverty, even in this climate. The question is, will you?

•(1215)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Dr. Courtneidge.

Mr. Dennis Howlett: I would agree there are a whole range of measures.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Excuse me, Mr. Howlett. I asked Dr. Courtneidge to speak, and then I'll give you some time.

Dr. John Courtneidge: Thank you. I'll be very brief.

I think the answer to your question is that you need a mix of reformist approaches and a mix of transformist approaches.

Along with your exactly accurate comments about making sure the present system works efficiently, I would add this point about making the public purse work efficiently for all Canadians.

I would introduce just one word that's evolving in policy circles, and that's the idea to complement the idea of redistribution, which is the idea of pre-distribution. In other words, if you get the distribution right from the get-go, you look at the mechanisms that cause a mal-distribution of incomes, and then go from there.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Mr. Howlett.

Mr. Dennis Howlett: Yes, I would agree a lot of measures already in place could be improved, and it would go a long way to achieving the results we would hope for. At the same time, I think longer term, some creative new proposals need to be looked at as well.

Ultimately, my wish would be that the federal government would sit down with other levels of government and develop a coordinated plan to reduce poverty, because there are very real differences in the nature of poverty according to the region. In the Maritimes, for example, there's a lot of seasonal work, and you need to shape the programs according to the regions. That's why it's important that the federal government work with the provinces and other levels of government to develop a comprehensive strategy. But certainly there's lots to start with, policy measures already in place, that you could use.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you.

Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Thank you for attending today.

I paid very close attention to everyone's presentations today, and the one thing that I'm very surprised by, and perhaps you've left this out in your details, is that there is virtually no mention of mental health or addiction in any of your presentations. It's my understanding that for 60% of our people who are in poverty or are homeless, the root of their issue is mental health and addiction. We've talked a lot about dollars and cents, programs, EI, and GIS, but I'm wondering why that was not discussed here today.

Dr. John Courtneidge: Would you like me to respond to this? I'm happy to do that.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Dr. Courtneidge, please.

Dr. John Courtneidge: Your point is very well taken about the creation of ill health of all kinds through economic inequality in that segment that we call poverty. I can tell you from my own experience of having lived in income insecurity now for 15 years, even though I have a three-month contract with Canada Without Poverty that's just above the minimum wage. I'm being paid \$10 per hour to do 25 hours' work.

The stress creates the long-term mental issues you're talking about. The only way I've managed to get through this—

Mr. Ben Lobb: I don't mean to be disrespectful, Doctor, but what in particular do you propose in your presentation as a solution?

Perhaps Mr. Howlett would like to comment, because you had quite an in-depth presentation. In it there's a lot about dollars but nothing about mental health or addiction. What does your group recommend or suggest to combat this issue?

Mr. Dennis Howlett: The best way to improve mental health would be to reduce poverty. It's a bit of a chicken-and-egg question, perhaps. The stress of poverty causes a lot of mental health problems. The reverse is also true. You would argue that mental health causes people to go into poverty, but it works the other way as well.

At the same time, I would recognize that you do need some targeted programs for particular groups of people with challenges. Assisted housing and other programs would be very helpful.

• (1220)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Mr. Howlett, Mr. Lobb wishes to speak.

Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I would beg to differ on that front, that dollars and cents will help somebody with paranoid schizophrenia, with a bipolar disorder. If that's our argument here, I think we're off track.

What I would also like to ask, Ms. Yalnizyan.... I'm sorry if I made a mistake in my pronunciation.

Ms. Armine Yalnizyan: No, it's correct.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Freezing the EI premiums.... I worked in the finance department of a company, and the fact is that in our current climate, the EI premiums likely would have been around \$1.85. Today they're frozen at \$1.73. That would add jobs. Would you suggest that freezing EI rates will in fact help add jobs to this economy? At the company I worked for, just the fact of freezing that rate was going to add one job at over \$43,000. Is that what your economic research has also indicated?

Ms. Armine Yalnizyan: Yes, there's no question that if you freeze the premium rates at this stage, you're going to not add insult to injury. But you've done that. You've done that in the legislation. It doesn't even get looked at until 2011. We're not talking about whether you're going to raise the premium rates. We're talking about what you are going to do to help the jobless, because those premium rates are set at a level, at your will. You have set up a commissioner to do that.

Could I speak to your earlier question about mental health and poverty?

Mr. Ben Lobb: Yes, please do.

Ms. Armine Yalnizyan: I completely understand your concern on that, and I would concur that there other supportive programs you could put into place. You know, we de-institutionalized an awful lot of people about 10 to 20 years ago. When I grew up there were no homeless people on the street. Part of it has been public policy. These people have no place to go and no way to hang on to a place that they can afford to live in because they can't get a job.

But I would like to say that quite beyond that group of people, who are poor and do have mental health issues, we have a new constellation of people called the working poor who we didn't have ten years ago. We have a 30-year structural change in incomes,

where at the middle of the income pack wages have been absolutely stagnant, but not housing costs, not education costs, not energy costs, not all of the basics. So the savings rate has plummeted. We're not talking about mental health for people at the middle. We're talking about people who are not being paid more. Some people are being paid a lot more, but an awful lot of people are not being paid more for the work they're doing. In fact, they're being paid less. If they lose their job, they're likely to obtain a less-paying job. But the costs of the basics continue to rise.

With due respect, Mr. Lobb, I think we are facing a real disaster in the making if we just say that poverty is about somebody else, probably someone with a mental health problem, and I don't really need to deal with it with a program. We are going to have a wave of economic dislocation. This is going to affect you and everybody. You can predict poverty by postal code in your riding now.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I thank you for your comments. I think you missed my point.

My disappointment was that in the presentations today, nothing was mentioned about mental health. And not once would I ever suggest that this is the only issue. I understand the economic impacts. I understand the business climate, the need for stimulus, the whole point. I was just clearly wanting to mention that I didn't hear that today, and I thought I would, coming here today.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Lessard, you have five minutes.

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

In my turn, I want to thank you for being here today and to welcome you.

I'm going to get straight to the point. I find it comforting to see that there are still people like you who are still indignant about the situation in which we place certain categories of our fellow citizens.

We're seeing, in a striking manner, the impact of the measures and policies of two successive governments in Canada. Some colleagues here are realizing that the measures taken in the past have not only produced no results, but have also aggravated the situation.

You rightly emphasized that the only measures that have proven effective have been taken by certain provinces, whether it be acts or policies. One province has a policy and strategies, whereas others have only strategies.

You also say that some categories of the population are particularly hard-hit: women, heads of single-parent families, aboriginal persons, persons with disabilities, immigrants and single individuals.

I'm going to ask you a question that I put to other stakeholders who have appeared before us. We'll have to make recommendations to the House of Commons. Ms. Yalnizyan said that some things are urgent. You put a great deal of emphasis on employment insurance and I entirely agree with you. However, if one measure had to be put in place very quickly and could have an impact on all the groups I've just mentioned, what would it be?

• (1225)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Who was your question for?

Mr. Yves Lessard: For all the speakers.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Mr. Courtneidge.
[*English*]

Dr. John Courtneidge: I'd like to point the committee to the National Council of Welfare report, which I have here. I have marked in here the page where respondents said what they would like to see happen. They said that they would like to see a pan-Canadian guaranteed annual income scheme.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you, Dr. Courtneidge.

Mr. Howlett.

Mr. Dennis Howlett: I would say that raising the child tax benefit is one of the simplest and easiest things that could be done to deliver assistance to those most in need. For provinces that have a similar plan, that money would be available to them as well.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you.

Madam Yalnizyan.

Ms. Armine Yalnizyan: I have to say that there's no single thing that would help all of those groups you've mentioned. The single measure that would help the broadest sweep of people would be reforms to EI, but that would not touch all of the groups you've mentioned.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: All right.

Ms. Law, do you want to speak as well?

[*English*]

Ms. Kelly Law: To add to what my colleagues have said, all three of their points are very important, but we didn't touch on housing. We need to deal with housing as well.

To address what Mr. Lobb said earlier, we need to also discuss—
[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I'm going to stop you there because I'm going to ask a second question which will also be very brief.

Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland have managed to lower the poverty rate among children and seniors quite sharply. The

poverty rate among children there is one-third of the rate here and half of our rate for seniors. That's quite exemplary.

Are you, who have no doubt examined what is going on elsewhere able to give some examples of measures that have been particularly effective in those countries?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): You have 41 seconds left. I'm going to stop the watch.

[*English*]

This is an important question that Monsieur Lessard has asked. Since there is very little time left, and you will not have enough time to answer it, perhaps I can suggest that you send us a written answer through the clerk. It's an important question, concerning where we go next in terms of tabling the report in the House of Commons.

But you can disregard this, Mr. Howlett, and then Dr. Courtneidge, because you have all of, I think, 55 seconds to answer.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Dennis Howlett: The key thing in the countries in Europe where they have made progress has been that they set goals, a timetable and a comprehensive plan, so it's not one measure but a combination of measures. It differs a bit by country, but most countries that have made progress have had a plan, with goals and timetables. Not always, but I think it's better to have a legislated mandate, such as in Quebec, where there is accountability and the governments have to report back on the progress that they make.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you.

Madame Law, do you wish to add something to this?

Ms. Kelly Law: No.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Dr. Courtneidge.

Dr. John Courtneidge: Yes. I have a book on progress and poverty in Sweden, which I'll lend to you. The key thing to do is to develop the cooperative sector. This is a long-term project, and if you look at Swedish history—and likewise, I suspect, in Denmark—that's the answer.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you.

Do you have a short answer, Madame Yalnizyan?

• (1230)

Ms. Armine Yalnizyan: No, I will pass, thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you very much.

I do have a question. We've come to the end of the second round and to the end of our meeting, but one thing has struck me. We've talked about child poverty, seniors' poverty, but apart from a very short mention by Mr. Lessard a few minutes ago, nobody mentioned immigrants.

Seeing that immigrants are a group of people I'm particularly interested in, I wondered whether I might take a couple of minutes of your time for you to tell me about the pattern among the immigrant population. I'm not talking here of people who've been here 20 years. I'm talking about fairly recent immigrants. Can you tell me whether there is a pattern of more child poverty and less seniors' poverty? Is that pattern the same within the immigrant group, or is it at all different? That is my question.

Would somebody like to speak to that?

Dr. Courtneidge and then Mr. Howlett.

Dr. John Courtneidge: Yes, I would. I'll point you to a resource of articles that I've written in a newspaper in Halifax called "Touch BASE". I will try to provide those articles directly to you. I'd also point to this chart in our presentation on facts and figures.

In essence, 50% of Canadians have no financial resources and no income-generating resources. They don't own land, they don't have interest-bearing accounts, they don't own stocks and shares. So it's no wonder—I speak as an immigrant, because I am an immigrant to this country—that something like one-third of new immigrants who come to Canada with their hearts set on making a new life in this country go home.

I've come here from the east end of Toronto, Ms. Minna's riding, but bluntly, immigrants can't afford to live here. This is my last gamble, in Ottawa. I can't afford to live in Canada. I came to Ottawa because as an immigrant we couldn't afford to live in Toronto.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I'm sorry to cut you off.

Mr. Howlett.

Mr. Dennis Howlett: Well, immigrant poverty is one of the areas where poverty is rising, along with youth poverty, and one of the reasons in common is that wage rates at the low end have been quite low. Generally, a majority of immigrants will work, but often they work at minimum-wage jobs, and minimum wages, generally, have not been adjusted to be above the poverty rate.

We are finally seeing some provinces where they are raising minimum wages, but still, none of them are at or above the poverty line. That's one of the major reasons that immigrants are having a much harder time in the last few years getting ahead and out of poverty than in previous decades, when they were able to start with some challenges and difficulties but were fairly quickly able to move up and become secure. But that's not happening now.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you.

Madame Yalnizyan.

Ms. Armine Yalnizyan: Recent immigrants, with whom you are concerned, are a part of a category of new labour market entrants, which include young men and women as well. We know that in the last 10 to 15 years, when you look at labour market trends, wage rates and also the permanence of jobs have declined for new labour market entrants. That goes to Dr. Courtneidge's point about pre-distribution, or at least distribution of incomes that start primarily from how you can make your own living.

Given that this recession is creating a huge amount of downward pressure on wages, loss of benefits, loss of security of work, working hours, we know that we have created more jobs in the last ten years before the recession than any other country in the G-7, but in about 59% of them the growth in precarious jobs was precipitous. That means you have no bargaining power. You cannot command your wage rate. You cannot command your benefits. If you want to get rid of poverty, you have to deal with those labour market conditions, which affect immigrants as well as others.

Madam Chair, I wonder if you would permit me to say one thing to—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Excuse me. I suspect you will want to speak to Mr. Lobb. Then I'm going to have to give him time to reply on the record as well.

Ms. Armine Yalnizyan: Actually it's vis-à-vis a comment Mr. Komarnicki made at the outset.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Then I'll give Mr. Komarnicki a chance to reply if he wishes.

Go ahead, Madame Yalnizyan.

Ms. Armine Yalnizyan: Mr. Komarnicki made the very important point that you can only spend what you've got. I would like to draw attention to the fact that this government has spent \$220 billion since January 23, 2006, on tax cuts. That creates an awful lot of space that could have been spent on doing some of the things we were talking about. So it was a policy choice that was made by this government. You went through a very meticulous list of things that this government has made small steps towards, steps in the right direction in this budget.

I would like to also point out to the committee and have it on record that all the spending changes in budget 2009, the year of the biggest stimulus package—and the only stimulus package budget the federal government has ever put forward in the face of a huge economic storm—all of the spending measures are temporary; all of the tax measures are permanent. There has been a very clear priority put forward in this budget as to how to deal with economic catastrophe, and I'm afraid I don't think the formula that is put forward there is the solution.

• (1235)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you.

Mr. Komarnicki, do you wish to reply? Give a short answer, please.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I appreciate your enthusiasm, but I can tell you that many Canadians who have worked hours and hours to try to sustain their families are paying too much tax, in their view, because of the government tax-and-spend mentality. And saving them some of those taxes so that they spend is creating jobs right across the country. It may even affect your job. So there are two sides to that coin.

I appreciate what you're saying, but you have to remember that many Canadian taxpayers are tired of governments continuing to raise taxes and spending them somewhere else. What they want to see is frugal spending, meeting the needs of those that need to be met, doing the best they can with the dollars they do have, and not wasting them on various types of programs that aren't meeting the needs. As Mr. Howlett said, you have to use those funds you do have in a strategic and targeted way, because you do have a limited amount of sources; it's not unlimited.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you, Mr. Komarnicki.

[English]

I'm sorry I just have to stop here.

[Translation]

Ms. Yalnizyan answered directly and I've already said I would let Mr. Komarnicki answer, but I'm stopping there, Mr. Lessard.

[English]

I would like to thank you all for coming. This is obviously an issue that we all take to heart, even though some of us think that it should be done one way and others think that it should be done another way.

Thank you so very much. I apologize to you if you expected to have a television recording. This is not going to take place, but I understand that there is an audio broadcast on the parliamentary website if you wish to listen to what has gone on this morning.

Thank you once again.

This is the end of the first part of the meeting. We will start the second part of the meeting immediately. Please do not go away.

• (1235)

(Pause)

• (1240)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to continue this meeting, please. Again, this is not a televised meeting, but there is an audio broadcast on the parliamentary website.

An hon. member: I thought it was on TV.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Well, yes. I'm not the chair. I will just transmit the message, once again.

Go ahead, Mr. Komarnicki, please.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I was making a point of order with respect to the motion, because it seemed to me that before—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): We're not discussing the motion right away. I would like to just get rid of this point, if you don't mind.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: All right. When do you get the motion, then—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Yes, I will.

Go ahead, Mr. Vellacott, please.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): I have a question. It may well be our preference for that, for sure, but if we only televise two committees on the Hill at a time and other committees get priority because a minister's at committee or it's the finance committee, and so on, then that's the reality or the caveat there.

We may well have the preference, as was said as well. We do have it all in audio, as you well pointed out. This just means that we don't get our faces there, but that may be preferable anyhow.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Could I interrupt and suggest that this discussion be held with the chair when the chair is present?

I feel that everything you're telling me I'm going to have to tell him. Today's Tuesday, so wait until Thursday morning and please make your ideas known directly to him. I think it would be much more worth while, particularly since I don't want to take time away from the discussion on Monsieur Lessard's motion.

Is that agreeable? Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Lessard, go ahead, please.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Madam Chair, I'm going to be a bit contrary in suggesting once again that we defer discussion precisely because the committee chair and other persons are absent. I know this is a point of interest for everyone.

At the first committee meeting with Mr. Komarnicki, we had a very constructive discussion that led us to introduce an amendment to the motion. We could consider it on Thursday or next week, when the committee is at full strength.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: With respect to the motion that was just distributed, it doesn't show as I had amended it at the last meeting. I actually put forward an amendment. I don't know if we had a discussion or vote on it, but there was an amendment. Is that not reflected?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): The clerk just told me there was no vote last week at that time.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Okay, but I did put forward an amendment to the motion.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I suggest, Mr. Komarnicki, that you write the amendment, present it to the clerk, and then that could be integrated into the discussion we will probably have at the next meeting, which is the day after tomorrow.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: No. I think I actually had amended the motion at the last meeting. Right now this motion should be discussed as amended, not in its original form.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Mr. Komarnicki, the clerk informs me that the amendment was not agreed to by the members of this committee. It is up to you to now reintroduce the amendment at the next meeting of the committee.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I will introduce the amendment right now.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): According to the clerk, it is your right to do that. However, I would strongly suggest, and it's only a suggestion on my part, Mr. Komarnicki...

Monsieur Lessard has made a suggestion asking for all discussion on his motion to be reported back the day after tomorrow. I would very much like to ask this group whether they agree with this.

It's your right to present it, but I would suggest that you—

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: We have a fairly strong opinion in that the amendment, which basically added the words “at the conclusion of the poverty study and for one meeting” is the way to go. We're not going to change our view on that, regardless of discussion. We would want the matter put to a vote.

● (1245)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Before I give Mr. Savage the right to speak, the clerk informs me that there is no choice but to reintroduce your amendment to the motion.

Monsieur Savage, and then I will come back to Mr. Lessard.

Mr. Michael Savage: It is my recollection that we discussed the amendment and that the chair, as he was concluding the meeting, indicated we had come to an agreement on the amendment. I thought we had come to an agreement on the amendment and that we would discuss the rest of it later.

Be that as it may, it seems that your suggestion is probably the right one. We should get this amendment written out, brought to the next meeting, and we should conclude our discussion of this at the next meeting.

An hon. member: My advice would be—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Excuse me. It's a point of contention, and I would like to have the right information from the clerk. You can understand that.

The clerk tells me that Mr. Lessard amended his own motion and that the amendment from Mr. Lessard was agreed on. She told me a moment ago, again, that the record shows—and I am quoting the clerk here—that your amendment, Mr. Komarnicki was not agreed on and that you must reintroduce your amendment to this motion.

I will now ask for this committee's agreement on reporting Mr. Lessard's motion and all discussion on the motion to our next meeting, which is the day after tomorrow. Do I have a general agreement?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Madam Vice-Chair, you are avoiding the fact that I have an amendment I can propose now that should be voted on, not steered to the next meeting. We want it dealt with in the fashion we have it in now, and for obvious reasons.

It is not a complicated amendment. It is an amendment that says, after “examine”, “at the conclusion of the poverty study and for one meeting”.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Point of order, and then I'll go on to Mr. Lessard.

Mr. Michael Savage: We're not on discussion on this motion right now, so we cannot entertain an amendment if we're not on discussion of the motion. Is that correct?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): No. Thank you, Mr. Savage.

Monsieur Lessard.

Excuse me. I'm sorry, Mr. Komarnicki, I've given—

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: It's a point of order that you—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: The point of order is this. That amendment as I have it was already put forward, and we can't be discussing another one, because that one was on the table.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Mr. Komarnicki, I'm sorry. I think we're not understanding each other. We are not discussing Mr. Lessard's motion in any shape or form, including any amendments to it. That's the first thing.

The second point I want to make is that the clerk tells me—and I will repeat again—that the records show that the motion that you proposed had not been accepted and that you must reintroduce it. The debate was ongoing definitely, but there was no....

I'm going to ask for a show of hands. I will not entertain any more questions.

Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I entirely agree with your position, Madam Chair. I find it logical. We can't decide on the time we're going to devote to a subject when we haven't even decided whether we are going to address it. First we have to decide whether we accept the motion and then determine the time we are going to devote to it.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

[*English*]

I would like to ask the members of this committee now to stop the discussion around Mr. Lessard's motion so that we can take it up and give it enough time—because I can see there are several points to be discussed, and I'll let the chair know—for next Thursday's meeting.

So I'd like to ask for a show of hands so that we can stop this discussion on Mr. Lessard's request. He is the proposer of this motion. Could I have a show of hands on behalf of the people who wish to stop this discussion as asked for by Mr. Lessard himself?

(Motion negated)

● (1250)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Mr. Vellacott, you have the right to speak.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I have a question, Madam Chair. If I understand from the clerk, then, do we have Mr. Komarnicki's amendment that he proposed? It's agreed then, I guess, if there's no indication of a vote at the end, but is that not on the table then?

I mean, we can introduce it, whatever, but I thought it was already proffered to the committee.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): The answer is the same that I've given several times now, Mr. Vellacott. Mr. Komarnicki must reintroduce his amendments. He can do so now if he wishes to.

Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: We add the words after "examine" in the third line: "at the conclusion of the poverty study and for one meeting".

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): This is Mr. Komarnicki's amendment to Mr. Lessard's motion. I'll read it again: On the third line in English, "persons with disabilities examine at the conclusion of the poverty study and for one meeting the operation and financial support", etc.

This is Mr. Komarnicki's amendment.

Mr. Martin wishes to speak on this, and then Mr. Lessard.

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: I just want Mr. Komarnicki to understand that I understand what's going on. Frankly, I have to say I'm disappointed.

We have a motion brought forward in all sincerity by Mr. Lessard that is obviously very important to a very at-risk and often marginalized group of citizens in our society today, and a very serious question that he wants addressed, not only for his own constituents but certainly for mine and for all our constituents. To relegate it to a time further on, when we've done the poverty study, and to only have one day on it is, to me, to be dismissive of it.

This brings me to the major point I want to make: that is, as a committee, we really do need to somehow find a way to deal with issues of the disability community. We have a responsibility. It's in the committee name itself that we deal with people with disabilities here, but we never do. We don't ever get to it because, as is happening today, we're allowing the government, in this instance, to push it off to a later date, for one day.

That should be totally unacceptable to anybody around this table if they have any concern or respect for or desire to help those who are disabled in this country to participate in the communities they live in and to participate in the economy. I find it very disappointing and disturbing that this is what we're doing.

I've suggested this on a number of occasions here as we've dealt with this issue and other issues, and you will remember this, Chair, because you were chair back in 2004-05 when we struck a subcommittee of this committee to look at issues of disability. They then were able to get their teeth into some pretty major and important initiatives and brought back a report to the larger committee to be discussed by us and to be forwarded to government.

I would suggest that one way of dealing with Mr. Lessard's motion, and also other issues of disability because there's a lot....

This is just one piece that I think needs to be addressed. For example, some of the enabling accessibility funds come to an end in May and won't be available any more to groups out there to use to fix up their places so that disabled people can participate. We have other issues. This is only one issue that is of concern to the disability community out there across this country.

We need to get serious about it, we need to deal with it, and we need to deal with it in a timely fashion. I suggest that one way to do so, if the committee is interested, is to strike a subcommittee so that it would be the full focus and whole focus of that committee to actually get it done.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I have to tell you, Mr. Martin, that I did think of that. We've discussed this before. From what I understand, the chances of our being able to strike a subcommittee with the right human resources are very slim because the human resources are not really available at this time. That is a big problem we have. I just wanted to bring that up.

• (1255)

Mr. Tony Martin: You're saying that because we don't have the resources we can't study issues that concern people with disabilities. Is that what you're saying?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): No. I'm saying that this may be a big problem if we decide as a group to strike a subcommittee to study disabilities. That's what I'm saying.

However, I don't want to go further on this. Listen, we're not going to solve this problem today. We know that. There are about four minutes left in this meeting. I would strongly suggest that.... Mr. Komarnicki's amendment is on the table, as we say. It's now accepted as an amendment—not accepted, excuse me. It's been tabled.

I would strongly suggest—and once again I need your advice on this—that we leave it as is. I know I've given Mr. Martin some extra time, but we can come back to this on Thursday morning and try to give it a big chunk of time. I'll speak to the chair on this, so that I can give everybody else a chance to voice their opinions, both on Mr. Komarnicki's amendment and obviously on the motion itself.

Mr. Vellacott, do you absolutely want to say something now on this?

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Is it my turn in the speaking rotation?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I've just made a suggestion—

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I know, but we've already had a vote on that, with respect, Madam Chair. We've already—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): No. We've not had a vote. I'm asking now that Mr. Komarnicki has tabled his amendment.... This is a different thing altogether. He has tabled his amendment. The amendment has been duly tabled.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I understand, but I think you'd get the same result. I'm just asking if it's my turn in the rotation. Then I would—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): No, it's not your turn.

Excuse me. It's Mr. Lessard's.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lessard, go ahead, please.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thought we were in a cooperative dynamic, when Mr. Komarnicki suggested an amendment to my motion, which we did, moreover. I thought there was a genuine concern to examine this matter.

Madam Chair, my remarks will perhaps be of no use, but, with your permission, I'm going to put a single question to Mr. Komarnicki. If he answers in the affirmative, we can stop the debate. It must be borne in mind that Mr. Allison, when he was chair, said that he would accept Mr. Komarnicki's amendment after disposing of my motion, since we first have to decide whether or not we are going to study it. So we would decide afterwards on the time we would devote to it.

Do Mr. Komarnicki and his colleagues agree to resume the debate, including on his motion, on Thursday? If he does, there's no problem. Otherwise, I'm going to make my remarks.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Mr. Komarnicki, would you like to answer that?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: The answer is no, and I ask that the matter be put to a vote.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): What do you want put to a vote?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: My amendment.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Your amendment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I reserved my right to speak. His answer is no. Consequently, Madam Chair, I'm going to make my speech.

It's quite surprising—

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Excuse me.

[*Translation*]

I'm stopping you for a moment, Mr. Lessard.

[*English*]

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

Just so everybody is on the same page, there is no limit on debate in committees.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Excuse me. I'm listening to my clerk, if you don't mind. I'll try to get an opinion from her, with all due respect, Mr. Chong.

It is almost one o'clock, and I intend to cut off whoever is speaking at one.

Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Madam Chair, I'm now going to make my speech.

My colleague Mr. Chong is entirely right: there's no limit on debate of this kind. I made a suggestion to our Conservative colleagues. They rejected it—

[*English*]

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Mr. Vellacott.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: The question was moved, so there's no more debate.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): It is now one o'clock. I warned everyone here that I would stop at one.

The meeting is adjourned.

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