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**Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills
and Social Development and the Status of
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Monday, March 29, 2010

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Chair

Ms. Candice Hoepfner

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

Monday, March 29, 2010

• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC)): Order.

I call to order meeting number seven of the Standing committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

We have committee business to look at today. We are going to begin with a motion from Mr. Savage.

Mr. Savage, do you have a motion that you want to put forward?

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Yes, Madam Chair, I have.

It would be nice if all the members were here for this. I see a couple of them coming in.

The Chair: If you'd like, perhaps you could slowly start reading.

Mr. Michael Savage: Let me read it into the record.

The Chair: That's a good idea; read it into the record.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you, Madam Chair, I will read it into the record.

[Translation]

The French begins, "...with the agreement of the Ministers responsible..."

[English]

That the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, with the agreement of the ministers responsible for the estimates, provide to the committee on the day they are scheduled to appear to defend their estimates an electronic version of their remarks to be distributed one hour before the start of the scheduled meeting; and that, notwithstanding the duration of ministerial opening remarks, the committee allocate ninety minutes for questions by members.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Savage. Did you want to begin our discussion by defending your motion?

Mr. Michael Savage: Yes, that would be my pleasure.

We've had a number of occasions on which ministers have appeared before the committee. Quite often when they appear, there's been a lot of confusion about where the copies are of their presentation. I think it was the last time they were here—it was on either Bill C-50 or Bill C-56—that we were told that they were waiting for their comments to come, and it took quite a while.

When ministers come to defend their estimates at committee, one of the most important functions of this committee occurs, which is to ask questions. Human Resources is a big department. I can't speak on behalf of Labour, but Human Resources is one of the largest departments in the government. There are a lot of questions that come out of these estimates. I think it's very important for the ministers, as well as for the committee, that we have as much time as possible to have questions and that we have a sense of what they're going to say before they come here to say it. It's very difficult to ask questions when we don't know the content of the remarks they'll make in opening them up.

This is simply a motion that puts something in place to try to assist the ministers and make their lives easier.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): I would like to support that motion, in that some of us do a fair bit of preparation before we come, in order to be able to ask the minister and officials some relevant and good questions. The more we're able to access exactly what the minister and her officials are going to say, the better we can do that job. So in the interests of our being able to do our job well, I think this motion makes sense.

Before I continue, I'd like to tell the committee—I suppose everybody knows this—that the chair's family is here, and in the interests of the family I want to say that you are doing an excellent job, and particularly from the standpoint of this end of the table, in protecting the right of all of the members to have a chance to ask questions. So far in your tenure, we've gotten to the fourth party every time for the last round, and that didn't happen very often previously. I want to thank you for that. I think it's important to recognize that we have a right, as well as everybody else, to ask our questions. We have an order of asking that I think needs to be respected, and you do that.

Getting back to this motion, asking for 90 minutes to be allocated after the minister makes his or her presentation would ensure that this in fact continues to happen, and if for some unfortunate reason you should be replaced by somebody else, the next chair would do equally as fair a job in making sure that everybody gets their chance to ask questions.

Those would be the reasons behind my supporting the resolution the member has presented this afternoon.

Thank you.

• (1535)

The Chair: Thank you very much. I appreciate your comments, Mr. Martin.

Madame Folco.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I don't want to propose an amendment, but I do want to make some comments and I want them to be understood. We have already had a few small problems, not necessarily with this minister, but with others. Obviously, the notes must be in both official languages. It is very important to put that on the record. I don't want to propose an amendment for that; I just want to make a suggestions. I think it is sad that I have to point it out. I am not throwing stones at any minister or committee. However, I have sat on committees where the minister appeared and spoke without notes. It is the usual, normal practice for any witness, minister or not, to submit notes in both official languages, even before the meeting. Mr. Savage has made this motion, and I want to know what he thinks.

[English]

The Chair: I just want to make one comment. I think that traditionally ministers are extremely busy, and we appreciate the time they take to come to committees. Whether it's thirty minutes or an hour, I think we appreciate it. I want to make sure that's on the record.

But you're asking Mr. Savage a question.

Did you want to respond to that, Mr. Savage?

Mr. Michael Savage: Sure.

Keep in mind that when we have the ministers come here, we often have two ministers who come. At times in the past, most of the questions have revolved around one minister or the other, usually on the human resource side. At this committee in the last few years, since I've been on it—and Mr. Lessard has been on this committee since I think before the Second World War, and I know that Madame Folco was on this previously—

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I even chaired the committee.

Mr. Michael Savage: —and has chaired this committee as well.... So there are people who have been around before, and different ministers have different styles.

But when we look at the last couple of times that the minister has come before the committee—this committee was a busy committee last year—there were a number of EI initiatives, and we didn't feel that they addressed some of the key issues we thought should have been addressed, issues of access in particular, and of some kind of national standard for EI. But we had a number of bills: in the budget a year ago there was the extension of EI benefits, which required some discussion, and the minister came before the committee on that; then we had a busy fall with Bill C-50 and Bill C-56, and it was in debating these two pieces of legislation that this committee dug up a lot of questions about the legislation, such as on the issue of the self-employed, for example, Madam Chair.

The reason we need to make sure that the minister gives us as much time as she possibly can is that it was at this committee that a lot of the questions about that bill came forward. For example, the question of how much of a draw this would be on the EI fund came about in discussion with either officials or the minister. There was also the issue of whether the rate was fair for the people in Quebec. I recall that the rate was \$1.73 for everybody, and I think it was \$1.37 or \$1.38 in Quebec, keeping in mind that Quebec was already largely covered for maternal and parental benefits.

So this committee has done some significant work with the ministers here.

It has also just crystallized in my head right now that I think I've made my point. I'm ready to have a vote.

• (1540)

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): I feel a bit the same as Madame Folco. It's not really normal practice, but I think there could be a friendly amendment at the end, where it says “before the start of the scheduled meeting”, that would add “and subject to the minister's availability”, because as all ministers do, they try to accommodate the requests of each committee. The committee is the master of its own destiny, as we all know, but in each situation we have to do the best we can.

So I'm offering a friendly amendment to add after “meeting” the words “and subject to the minister's availability”.

The Chair: Mr. Savage, would you be open to a friendly amendment?

Mr. Michael Savage: Well, I consider the member friendly, but not the amendment.

The Chair: So you reject it?

Mr. Michael Savage: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): First of all, I don't recall when an electronic version of the minister's remarks has been released contemporaneously with a written version of remarks. Even when Madame Folco was the chair, that never happened. It doesn't happen with respect to any witnesses, and perhaps for good reason.

And to suggest that it should be at least an hour prior to the meeting.... Perhaps the member would want to amend that to say, “and some questions and answers be prepared for the member as well”, which he might ask the minister. It's just not done.

I don't think it would be wise for this committee to consider having an electronic version or any version distributed an hour or so in advance. All witnesses give their evidence as they speak, and if they provide a written statement at that point, that seems to be reasonable. But to suggest it be done any time in advance would be inappropriate, and certainly for that reason I couldn't support it.

I haven't seen it done and I don't think it's good practice, for a variety of reasons, including the fact that members would then obviously use the statements for whatever purpose they deem appropriate, which may not necessarily be acceptable to the person releasing the statement. I'm sure others who are here.... I know Mr. Casson has been a chair, and I think he'll vouch for the fact that it has just not been done, ever.

The Chair: Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Madam Chair, I am particularly put out that the minister does not agree with us, but we are used to that.

We must remember that this department is responsible for a wide range of activities. If I am not mistaken, no other department is responsible for so many activities. I believe one-third of Canada's budget goes through this department. When ministers appear here they make a 10 or 15-minute presentation and we learn about the contents as we go, so we have to form an opinion very quickly about what they are telling us. I think that even one hour ahead of time is very short. I don't know if there is a formal protocol that requires ministers to make presentations in this format, but I think this format does not respect our responsibilities. We are just here for the symbolism, every time.

We had the minister here, and we were able to ask her a few very quick questions, based roughly on the notion of what we had been told, without a little time to think about it. That is why I think this is a useful motion and quite respectful of the duties of the various ministers who appear here. We say we will set aside at least 90 minutes, perhaps twice a year, in this committee whose ostensible purpose is to advise the department. That does not seem very restrictive. This motion seems quite obvious. It even seems a little timid compared to what we really should be asking for.

● (1545)

[*English*]

The Chair: Just to comment on your question, Monsieur Lessard, I checked with my clerk, and he has agreed and advised me that we cannot compel ministers to do anything. If we look at the motion, though, it includes “with the agreement of the minister”, so we would have to get her agreement or their agreement. So this motion would be asking for their agreement. But you're correct, we cannot compel them to do anything.

Mr. Savage, please.

Mr. Michael Savage: No.

The Chair: You're all right?

Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I would propose an amendment to the motion to take out the words “an electronic version of their remarks to be distributed one hour before the start of the scheduled meeting” and replace them with “a written version of their remarks distributed at the start of the scheduled meeting”.

I would so move, as an amendment.

The Chair: So we have an amendment on the table that we replace “a written version”.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: “...and that a written version of their remarks be distributed in both official languages at the start of the scheduled meeting.”

The Chair: Would you like to speak to your amendment to this motion?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Yes. I think it makes infinite good sense. It's good common sense and has been the practice across the committees here; it provides the members with the remarks of the minister, and I think it's sufficient. Anything released in advance would open itself up to various kinds of uses and abuses that certainly I don't think would be acceptable. It meets the needs of the committee to know what the minister is saying as she's speaking, and I think it certainly conforms to the gist of the motion. So with that amendment we would support it, and without that amendment we would not.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Savage, you wanted to speak to the amendment.

Mr. Michael Savage: Yes. I agree with the comments that my colleague Mr. Lessard made about the importance of this. I don't consider it unreasonable to ask for these comments to be distributed before the meeting. I wouldn't ask that they would be, were it not that we've had circumstances where, when the minister comes, she doesn't come by herself. She comes with an army of people. The fact that they couldn't prepare comments in advance at one of those sessions we had but had to be running back and forth to wherever the office is across the bridge was ridiculous.

On the other hand, we're all here trying to make a point. We understand the minister has her schedule and we appreciate the fact that she is busy. This committee is busy as well. It has an important parliamentary function, and part of that job is to question the minister about her estimates. So if Mr. Komarnicki's amendment is to take out after “estimates”, “...an electronic version of their remarks, to be distributed one hour before the start of the scheduled meeting...”, if he's preparing a change in that to say, “...a written version of the remarks in both official languages be distributed at the start of the meeting...”, if he would change that to “prior to the start of the meeting, without delaying the start time of the meeting”, I would be okay with that.

The key point for me here, Ed and colleagues, is that we need 90 minutes. For the minister to come and have these long opening comments, which we've seen before, and then have time scheduled for committee business or something at the end, doesn't make sense. We need 90 minutes—it's not a long time—to ask questions of the minister. We all consider her a good friend and colleague and parliamentary associate. We're here for the purpose of making this a better government, and to improve what's legislatively happening in the House of Commons at the same time. So in that spirit I'd be prepared to accept that amendment if it were to say, “distributed prior to the start of the meeting, without delaying the start of the meeting”. If the 90 minutes for questioning is still part of the motion, then I will accept my colleague Ed's friendly amendment, and we can go forward and get some business done.

That's my view. I don't know how other people feel.

● (1550)

The Chair: Mr. Komarnicki, I'll ask you first, would you be willing to accept that friendly amendment to your amendment?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I would.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Lessard, do you want to speak to the amendment?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Yes, I can do that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Madam Chair, I will support this amendment. The mover did so, but he is removing an important piece, all the same. Usually, ministers who appear here already have a document. If I remember rightly, we have always been given a copy at the beginning of the meeting. I think it is a worthwhile idea to get it to us an hour beforehand, rather than at the beginning of the meeting.

That changes about 50% of the motion, but it is still 90 minutes. That is what is new. If we agree about the 90 minutes, we can leave it at that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Any other discussion regarding the amendment?

All right, we need to vote on the amendment first, and then we'll vote on the motion.

All those in favour of the amendment?

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Can we ask for the amendment to be read one last time?

The Chair: Yes, let me read the amendment.

We would take out, after “estimates”, “an electronic version of their remarks be distributed one hour before the start of the scheduled meeting”, and we would replace it with “a written version of their remarks be distributed in both official languages prior to the beginning of the meeting, without delaying the start of the meeting”.

That's the amendment.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Well, you can't say “prior to the beginning”.

The Chair: No, prior to the start of the meeting.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Prior to the meeting.

Mr. Michael Savage: Prior to the start of the opening of the beginning of the meeting.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: That's about it, yes.

Prior to the meeting. That's the way it is.

The Chair: Do you want to put in “five minutes prior to the meeting”? You don't want to do anything like that?

Ms. Raymonde Folco: No, no. Prior to the meeting. That's what you mean, isn't it?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I think distribute—

The Chair: Let's let Ed go ahead.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I think there's no ambiguity if it says “to be distributed prior to the start of the meeting”.

The Chair: Prior to the start of the meeting.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: And the meeting starts at 10 o'clock, so it has to be sometime prior to that.

The Chair: So that would be the amendment.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I don't have anything against the—

The Chair: Madam Folco, I'll just.... We had closed discussion, actually, on the amendment, so I was rereading the amendment, and we'll vote on it.

So it's “prior to the start of the meeting”.

An hon. member: Prior to the scheduled start of the meeting.

The Chair: Well, prior to the start of the meeting. We know it's when the meeting—

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): But he doesn't want delay of the meeting.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Prior to the scheduled start of the meeting I guess would be fine.

The Chair: Okay, we'll put that in. I'll read it one more time, and then we're going to vote on it: “a written version of their remarks be distributed in both official languages prior to the scheduled start of the meeting”.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: On the motion as amended, do we need any discussion, or can we vote on the motion?

Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): I have a comment on the motion. I heard all the people today. Our colleagues made comments about the time and so forth.

I won't make this motion, but I'll make a suggestion that there are two ways if they feel they don't have enough time. One is not to ask a question that's three minutes and 45 seconds, which I know we're all good at doing. The other might be to actually ask a question that's in the estimates, because I've been to many of these meetings, and I can count the number of times an estimates question has been asked on my hands. So that might be a good suggestion for my honourable colleagues when the minister comes, to focus on asking quick questions and asking questions that are on the estimates.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lobb.

We're actually discussing the motion, so as long as this discussion is on the motion that's on the table.... No? Okay.

Is there any other discussion regarding the motion that's on the table? All right, would you like me to read it?

An hon. member: No.

The Chair: No need to read it.

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

The Chair: All right. The second item we need to look at is the Centennial Flame Research Award for 2010. For those of you who, like me, are new to the committee, and maybe just as a reminder for former committee members as well, that is an award that we as a committee administer. So the time has come to look at the amount and make a decision on what the amount will be. Then we need to agree on a press release and send out a press release and invite applicants.

My understanding is that in past years we have given out an award of \$4,500, and it's been pretty consistent over the last few years. We have not raised it. There actually are funds in the account if we did want to increase the amount. Previously the amount was increased by about \$500 any time it was increased.

What I'd like to ask you is, first of all, would you like to keep the amount of the award at \$4,500 or would you like to increase it? That's my first question. I'm going to open that up to the floor and see if anyone has any comments.

Mr. Savage.

• (1555)

Mr. Michael Savage: Yes. I've been on this committee a few years now, and this is certainly a worthy award. There's always some confusion about the qualifications of this committee to choose the winner, but nonetheless we are mandated to do this. We want to be prudent with government money, but it would make sense to me to bring that up to \$5,000 this year. This is research by people with disabilities, who certainly could use the assistance. So I would propose a modest increase.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: I would agree with that, I think, in light of inflation and the fact that it's probably a bit more challenging for people living with disabilities to get this kind of work done.

Out of my knowledge of a research institute that operates out of Sault Ste. Marie and Algoma University, the rule of thumb is \$5,000 when they get research projects. Typically they're all over the map, but \$5,000 seems to be the number that comes up most often. So I would support raising this to \$5,000 as well.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Vellacott.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I think we're generally agreed to that, at least if I get a read of my colleagues here quickly, but I just would put on the record that this is not government moneys per se. I'm sure Mr. Savage meant that, but this is for the public as well. We could call it tourists', visitors', or Canadians' moneys, which are inserted down at the flame. So it's not out of government coffers per se.

I just want that on the record, so we're all very clear about it.

The Chair: Yes, that's a very good point. It's the money that's actually collected at the eternal flame. The amount that's donated is pretty impressive, actually.

I would need a motion, then, that we increase the amount.

Mr. Tony Martin: So moved.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Good. We will increase it to \$5,000, then.

The next thing I need a motion on is we need to issue a press release.

I think you all have a copy of last year's press release.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: No.

The Chair: Do we have a copy? All right. You should have a news release, 2009 Centennial Flame Research Award.

Could I have a motion, so that we can proceed with that press release?

Madam Folco.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Before making a motion, I would suggest that there be another paragraph to say that this year the amount is going to be increased, not just to say that it's going to be \$5,000. I think there should be some mention, one sentence, to say that it's being changed and increased.

The Chair: Okay, that sounds good. We might as well make it known that it has been increased to \$5,000.

Is there any other discussion around the press release? If not, can I have a motion that we send it out?

Madam Folco?

Good. Thank you.

All right, the next item of business is this.

I just wanted to give you some good news about our trip. We do need to do a little bit of business in relation to it, but Georges actually found out that if we take a chartered flight, we can have the plane all day. That means we don't have to leave the night before, spend all day on a bus, and then take a bus home. We can leave really early in the morning, take a plane, and the plane will get us where we need to go, and get us home. It will actually cost us \$1,000 less.

So very good work, Georges. Thank you for that.

• (1600)

Mr. Michael Savage: How many seats are on the plane?

The Chair: How many seats are there, Georges?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Georges Etoka): There are 18 seats.

The Chair: There are 18 seats. We're still six to eight members.

I think we should have a better date now. We are going to finalize it and let you know, but we're thinking it should give us more flexibility on a date, because we don't have to worry about evenings. Again, we'll get a date and let you know.

Ultimately, though, committee, as I'm sure we all know, when we make these trips, we'll have to pick a date, but it will not be good for everybody. If we can at least make sure either a member of the committee or a member of our party is able to attend, that will be our goal. But we'll try to keep it within the dates that we had agreed on initially.

I just need a motion, then, because we have a new budget. It's actually less. It is option B. Could I have a motion to accept that?

Mr. Savage? Thank you very much.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Could I ask a question, please?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I don't understand why in one option there are 13 people going, and in the other one there are only 12. Why is there a difference?

The Chair: Do you want to explain, Georges?

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: Ms. Folco, because we are no longer taking the bus back to Ottawa, we no longer need the logistics officer along. So there is one less person.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Ah, I see.

[*English*]

The Chair: You get one less person.

It was moved by Mr. Savage. All in favour of the budget?

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

The Chair: Thank you. The budget is agreed upon.

There are just a couple of items on which I want to give you some information. Mr. André will be bringing Bill C-395, his private member's bill, probably as soon as we get back in April, at some point. I just want to ask all of you, if you have any witnesses you would like to bring forward, if you could please get that to the clerk in the next 48 hours it would be appreciated. Then we can start planning the work surrounding Bill C-395. That was Mr. André's bill, the one where if there is a labour dispute your hours would be counted towards the waiting time. If you could, in the next 48 hours, please get those suggestions to our clerk, then we can start planning that.

I also want to let you know that you can expect that by April 12 we should start receiving some of the preliminary chapters on the poverty report. Some of the translation will be completed, so you'll have it in your hands and we can start at least having a look at it and deciding what we might want to do when we move forward. We still have a bit of work to do as far as witnesses are concerned, but at least we can start looking at that report.

And then the last item I want to discuss is the study we are going to be undertaking on adoption. We need to start planning that and the scope of it. I would like to suggest to the committee that we bring forward as a witness Mr. Watson. I would like to do it as soon as possible. He was the one who had initially brought forward this motion, and I think he could maybe help us with some terms of reference as far as what we should be looking at. I think it's an opportunity for us to maybe even produce a landmark report,

because it's been a long time since adoption has been looked at in Canada and a lot has changed. I think we probably would want to bring him forward anyway, because he knows a lot about this. But I'd like to see us bring him forward as a witness, and he actually would provide information on what kinds of witnesses we want to bring forward and what kind of testimony we want to hear.

Could I hear some thoughts on that?

Madam Folco.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I think it's great. It's very timely, certainly in terms of Quebec because of the Haitian situation and the children and so on and so forth.

But let me ask a question. I don't have any papers in front of me, so I may very well be wrong, but I had the impression that we had some other private members' bills before this. Am I wrong?

The Chair: We have Bill C-395 and we're finishing up Bill C-308. So we do have a few witnesses. We've had some logistical problems, but we're fitting them in.

What I'd like to do is at least start to plan the adoption study. It is some time away, but we do find sometimes it's a challenge getting witnesses lined up, so I'd rather be a little ahead of the game and have some planning on it. So when I say having Mr. Watson as early as possible, we're probably looking at late April or early May, but I just want to suggest that we bring him in early in the process. That way we can include his testimony in some of our suggestions.

Mr. Martin.

• (1605)

Mr. Tony Martin: I have absolutely no difficulty supporting this study and getting the work done and organizing it ahead of time so we are as efficient as possible.

I do, though, raise an issue that I've raised before at this table, and that's the challenge that's in front of us to deal with issues, if for no other reason than that it's attached to our name—people living with disabilities. As I travel back and forth across the country, more and more people living with disabilities are facing growing challenges. It's not getting better.

I moved a motion here a couple of years ago, that a subcommittee of this committee be set up to study the issues all of us have, that we could bring to the table, around how people living with disabilities participate in Canadian society. We've never been able to get to that. We say we'll do it after this. How long are we going to put off dealing with this?

We have a couple of ways of doing it. One is that we could say right now, once we've finished the adoption piece, let's move aggressively to look at an agenda that speaks to challenges of people living with disabilities, or we deal with the motion that I tabled a couple of years ago to set up a subcommittee that could work in parallel and report back. We've done these subcommittees before.

As I said before, when Madame Folco was the chair of the committee, we had a subcommittee to deal with people with disabilities, and there was a report brought back. At that time it was to look at issues around the parliamentary precinct. It was tabled, and some actions were taken. Even that piece I think needs to be revisited.

This is a group of people who have tremendous capability and potential to participate in our communities and our society, to contribute to the economy, but for various reasons, some of them befuddling, we don't move on this. If this committee could make a report, if we could get down to looking at some of those, I think it would be very beneficial and helpful.

So I make a passionate plea today to all of us to somehow find a way to get to this agenda item, because it is part of our mandate. It's the name of our committee.

The Chair: What we probably need to do, Mr. Martin, is bring forward a motion and then we can discuss it and make it part of our work plan, because we talked about committee business and how we wanted to proceed, and I don't think that came up when we came back.

Mr. Savage, please.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you.

I was going to go where Tony is going in this way. When Mr. Watson proposed this motion in the House of Commons, we didn't know what it meant. It was a wide-ranging motion. He came over to see me and explained to me what he wanted to do. I said we'd support him. All Liberals supported it. I think all members of the House supported it. But it was never our intent that we would support a huge long process on adoptions. For this committee to determine what our priorities are, I think we could do something significant on it. I certainly support bringing Jeff in and having him give us his view on this. But we've had other private members' bills that we've dealt with in a day or less, so a motion shouldn't necessarily dictate where this committee is going. That's for us to decide.

As Tony said, this is the committee on the status of persons with disabilities, and I have supported Tony's call. Initially, there were moments when I wondered if we needed a subcommittee or not. We were working on different things. We had the poverty study. We're coming to the end of our work on that.

If you look at the report the Senate did, if you look at any work that disabilities groups and poverty groups are doing now, you realize this is a huge issue of both social justice and economic development—social justice for the individuals and economic development for Canada. We're wasting a lot of the human potential of people with disabilities.

We do not do a good job as a country. We don't have a Canadians with disabilities act, as they have in the United States. We don't have a lot of the supports that other countries have. We should be doing this. I fully support having either a subcommittee...but I'd rather see our next big study be on the issue of disabilities. As part of that, for new members, other members know that the last two or three years, we've starting having a day on the Hill when members have spent the day in a wheelchair. I started that on the Hill two or three years ago,

and then a couple more joined two years ago. Last year we had a number of people, including Tony, and Maria was on it.

Ed, I'm not sure if you were in a chair.

• (1610)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Yes, and this year too.

Mr. Michael Savage: I think this year is the 60th anniversary of the CPA, the Canadian Paraplegic Association, who are the ones who organized this. I would encourage all members to be involved in this and to spend a day in a wheelchair on the Hill, and you'll find out what it's like. It's only a little snippet, but it gives you a good sense. I understand from discussion a few years ago that Mr. Lessard actually spent some time in a wheelchair at some point in his life.

So I think this issue of disabilities, which is in our committee's name, is a huge piece of what this committee should do. Perhaps Tony and I and others might spend time figuring out how we can manifest this, but at the very least we need to do something to recognize the huge opportunity this country is wasting and the injustice it's perpetuating for people with disabilities.

The Chair: Good, and that's why we want to have this discussion, because we do need to decide the scope of the adoption study, and then for whatever we want to do moving forward, we need to have a process.

Madam Minna is next.

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

I was actually going to say some things along the lines of Mr. Martin and Mr. Savage, because it is a study that we keep putting off. I understand there is a motion with respect to adoption, and I don't think it needs to be a very long process.

I have two points: one, that we make disabilities a major study of ours so we can come up with something really substantive, and the other that we first finish the poverty study. I would hate to leave for the summer and it's not been tabled in the House. I see people shaking their heads in agreement, and that's great. I just want to make sure we don't derail it in any way.

The Chair: Yes, it is a priority.

Hon. Maria Minna: Having said that, I think our responsibility for disabilities is a huge one. It's important, and I'm not suggesting that the study on adoption is not, but I don't think it should take an enormous amount of time. I think we should focus on our primary responsibility.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: With respect to the adoption study, I don't think it needs to be long, but it needs to be fairly comprehensive and we need to do a good job, whatever it takes. Mr. Watson is pretty passionate about it, and we want to be sure that the areas of concern to him are covered and that we hear what we need to hear to come forward with a good report, whatever that means. However, it doesn't have to be a particularly long report in doing that.

Having said that, I speak with some trepidation, because I wouldn't want anyone to change their mind after hearing me speak, but I know I was opposed to having a subcommittee dealing with the issue of disabilities because I think it deserved the hearing of this larger committee. I know we did a study with a narrower perspective back in 2005. Mr. Martin was there, and I think I was and Madame Folco also. It was a worthwhile study, but it was fairly narrow in scope. This committee is coming to the end of what we've been doing in a major way, and it would be good to start another more major project, and certainly the area of disability would be a good one. I think it deserves the attention of the entire committee, as opposed to a subcommittee, so I would certainly be supporting it personally. I haven't talked to a whole lot to my colleagues as to where we stand on that, but it seems like a reasonable approach down the road.

The Chair: Good, so it sounds that if you bring forward a motion, there will be support for it.

Madame Folco.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I'm not going to say this too often, so take advantage of it, Mr. Komarnicki, but I certainly support what you've just said. One of the problems with having a subcommittee is that some of our committee members here will also have to be on the subcommittee and will have twice as many meetings. That's one other reason, apart from the ones Mr. Komarnicki mentioned, that makes it so difficult.

Disabilities are part of our objective and our committee name, "status of persons with disabilities". It's really important to move on with that. I would absolutely go for having a full committee and full study on this. I think the time has come.

The Chair: Good. Then we are in agreement and will look at a motion.

However, I will just come back to my original request that we are going to be looking at adoption. So if you do have certain areas that you want addressed or certain witnesses you want to bring forward, start thinking about them, but in the meantime we'll get Mr. Watson here.

Of course our priority is finishing up the poverty study. We just have a couple of last witnesses that we're having trouble arranging, but we are making every effort and then we'll be looking at the poverty study while finishing up the private members' business that we need to do.

Mr. Lessard.

• (1615)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Madam Chair, I think we need to hear Mr. Watson to find out if we will need to hear witnesses. I am not sure I understand what outcome he is seeking with his motion. Listening to my colleagues, I think they are in the same boat. Perhaps we have understood, but we are not sure. In light of what he is going to tell us, we will see whether we need witnesses.

As for persons with disabilities, I think this should be a priority. If we can't start work this spring, at least we could start planning our work for the fall regarding the status of persons with disabilities.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: Madam Chair, I'm trying to find out if we have a schedule of our upcoming meetings. I wonder if you or the clerk could send out to our offices whatever we have confirmed from now until the end of May or even to the end of the session.

The Chair: Yes, we can do that. There has been quite a bit of... We've had to change things, but we'll send you what we have confirmed.

Are there any other comments or questions? Is there any other business?

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: We haven't decided yet on a date for that trip into Quebec, have we?

The Chair: No. We are just going to finalize.... What I'm looking at is April 13, either that or the following Tuesday. We'll probably look at a couple of dates and send them to you. We will have to decide very quickly.

Mr. Tony Martin: Either one of those is fine with me.

The Chair: All right.

I think we are all finished. Do I have a motion to adjourn? Madame Folco so moves.

The meeting is adjourned. Thank you.

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