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CANADA

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

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EVIDENCE

**Monday, April 19, 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, April 19, 2010

• (1530)

[Translation]

**The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.)):** Today is Monday, April 19, 2010 and this is the 11th meeting of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Our agenda for today is as follows: Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), a study of the Federal Support Measures to Adoptive Parents.

I would like to point out an error in the French version of the document.

I will read the motion that was adopted and we can then get down to work. The motion reads as follows:

The following motion was adopted by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities:

**Extract from the Minutes of Proceedings**

**Meeting No. 04**

**Wednesday, March 17, 2010**

It was agreed, —That the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development, and the Status of Persons with Disabilities examine current federal support measures that are available to adoptive parents and their adopted children, recognizing and respecting provincial and territorial jurisdictions in this regard, and following completion of its study, report back to the House with its findings.

The committee will now hear from Mr. Jeff Watson, MP for the riding of Essex, on the motion in question.

[English]

Mr. Watson, I think you have a proposition to make to us.

**Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC):** Yes, Madam Chair. Thank you.

[Translation]

**The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco):** Go ahead, Mr. Savage.

[English]

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** With the indulgence of Mr. Watson, before he gets going, I just want to clear the agenda.

My understanding is that we have some committee business to deal with after we hear from Mr. Watson. Is that not the case now?

**The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco):** I'm sorry, but I was told only a few minutes ago that I would chair. From what I understand

from the clerk, the committee business will be third on the agenda. We will have Mr. Watson, followed by the Adoption Council of Canada, followed by committee business, Mr. Savage.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** I see that, but we have scheduled 3:30 to 4:30 for Mr. Watson, and for 4:30 to 5:30... The committee ends at 5:30, right?

**The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco):** Yes.

Mr. Savage, from what I understand from the clerk, Mr. Watson will be our guest from 3:30 to 4:30. At 4:30 we will hear from the Adoption Council of Canada and the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa, and then we'll go onto committee business.

**An hon. member:** When, though?

**An hon. member:** At what time?

**The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco):** Well, you're catching me because I've—

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Mr. Watson wants to say something. He might have an idea.

**The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco):** —just sat down in the chair, and I really don't have all the answers.

[Translation]

What was provided for—

[English]

What was organized was a 15-minute committee business session, before 5:30, of course.

Mr. Watson, did you want to say something on this?

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Yes, Madam Vice-Chair, if it suits the committee's purposes, I don't mind giving testimony for only a 45-minute period, allowing the two witnesses subsequent to have an hour's worth of time. That would afford the committee 15 minutes to do their business. As well, they can do that on the front end, before I testify, if that suits them.

**The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco):** I'd like to hear from committee members.

Mr. Watson has made a very generous offer.

Madam Chow.

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** I'm here substituting for my colleague Tony Martin. I believe that he's quite interested in the committee's agenda. Mr. Watson's proposal sounds very good. Let's have him for 45 minutes, the Adoption Council and Children's Aid for an hour, and then 5:15 to 5:30 for the committee's agenda. That would be really good. I don't want to make a decision on behalf of Mr. Martin, because he believed that was coming later.

**The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco):** Okay.

Are there any other comments? Is that agreeable? I don't think we need to come to any kind of a vote. We're agreeing, then, that we will give Mr. Watson from 3:30 to 4:15? That's fine?

I think you have another matter you want to present to us, Mr. Watson.

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Yes, Madam Vice-Chair. At some point I have to report back home on what I do as a member of Parliament. I don't know if it's possible for you to ask the committee for their consent as to whether or not one of my staffers could take a few pictures of me while I give my testimony. If not, that's fine.

**The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco):** I was asked by Mr. Watson about this. I felt that as vice-chair I could not make that decision myself and that I needed to ask the committee if the committee would agree to having photographs taken during the committee meeting.

Comments, please.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** It's fine.

**The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco):** Mr. Savage is fine with it, and this side is as well.

The answer is yes, Mr. Watson, so let's get started right away.

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Thank you, Madam Vice-Chair.

Thank you to the committee, first of all for your patience in awaiting my testimony. As you may well know, last week I was ill to the point where I couldn't be in Ottawa, so I appreciate your patience and flexibility in accommodating my appearance here today.

I also want to thank the committee for in effect resurrecting my former motion, Motion 386, and for maintaining unanimity in doing so. I appreciate that the committee now owns the substance of the motion as its own, and I'm excited that we're able to move on and begin some of that study.

I have a few thoughts to share that hopefully will give some direction and I'll be pleased to take your questions afterward.

By now, of course, many of you will know my own story. In 1970 my biological mother came to Canada from Croatia four months pregnant with me. Because of some of the difficulties she faced being in a new country—language barriers and many other things—she made a choice, a difficult choice, to place me with what was then the Roman Catholic Children's Aid Society for adoption. I was adopted as an infant only a few weeks after my birth in 1971, so issues surrounding adoption certainly are very close to my heart on a personal level.

I have long had a dream, probably since childhood, that Canada would be a place that would welcome and affirm the worth of all

children, particularly those who find themselves without parents, that is, children who are born in Canada, and children from countries all around the world who cannot be placed with families in their own countries.

As an observation on where we find ourselves today, I think the infrastructure, if you will, surrounding adoption in Canada was created for a mid-20th century reality, but not necessarily for 21st century realities. Just as one illustration, I think we are going to be faced—particularly with climate change producing more dramatic crises—with an increase in humanitarian challenges in the 21st century. The example around Haiti and the earthquake, while that may or may not be linked to climate change, showed us, however, that when governments are focused on removing obstacles, we can respond quickly to those who are already in the queue for adoption. But I ask the question: how do we create an infrastructure for adoption so that we don't have to react?

This raises, of course, a prime question for the committee in its study, one that I've grappled with as an individual member. I certainly respect, first of all, the privileges of a committee, but also the jurisdictions of both the federal and the provincial and territorial governments; that is, how do you examine federal supports in isolation without looking at the infrastructure of adoption in Canada? The infrastructure, if you will, the delivery of adoption, rests in provincial and territorial authority, so how does one square the circle?

After thinking about this for some time, I think it's appropriate for the committee to make a comprehensive study of the infrastructure of adoption and the supports around it, to make observations, but ultimately to make a recommendation to the federal government to make it part of an agenda, perhaps within 12 months of the report being issued, to sit down, either as a first ministers item or with the relevant federal minister and provincial and territorial counterparts, and to examine how the two levels together can renew the mid-20th century infrastructure of adoption to support 21st century realities.

Beyond that, there may be a few other areas. I'll mention them in brief for the committee to consider.

• (1535)

One, the committee may want to look at immigration policy for the federal government and whether we need to create, in order to respond to humanitarian challenges, an adoption class at the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. It's an issue that I have recently brought to the attention of the minister and his policy people. I am personally interested in whether that can be functional.

Also, the committee may want to look at how we can encourage the adoption of older children. It's a particularly troubling trend that everybody wants a young child. Those who are older come with more challenges. How do we make it easier for families to take in older children? We may want to look at what supports we give adoptive parents to cope with the difficulties and challenges around adoption. I'm talking about post-adoption services and who funds them. Ultimately, how do we recognize the equivalency of parenting and child value with respect to special EI benefits?

Finally, as a broad encouragement to the committee, I encourage you to consider a landmark study. Think big, if for no other reason than to raise the profile of adoption throughout Canada and place the appropriate affirmation on the value of each and every human being. It is a rare opportunity to look at this topic. I encourage you to be bold, courageous, and thorough, but to ensure that government responds effectively, it is also important to keep recommendations focused and not so numerous that they become a recipe for ineffective action.

With that, I will thank the committee for letting me appear. I will answer what questions I can. I know that stakeholders who come after me will certainly have much greater statistical knowledge and will be able to respond, but I will do the best I can.

● (1540)

**The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco):** Thank you very much, Mr. Watson.

We'll begin the five-minute round, starting with Ms. Minna.

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair. I may be sharing with Mr. Savage.

What you're saying brings back an interesting comment for me. I visited Bangladesh recently. One of the questions that came to me repeatedly when I was there, from media and from a couple of ministers, was whether Canada was prepared to accept climate-change refugees—families, as well as children.

I suspect that at some point if there were a crisis of some kind, like the tsunami or the earthquake in Haiti, there might be children who would need to be helped through adoptions and what have you. That brings in the element of immigration and refugees, so the Canadian government probably has a role to play in creating some sort of section to deal with climate change refugees or disaster situations for children and adults. Have you thought about that aspect of it and how the refugee angle would work?

You said it would require special EI benefits for these parents. Are you referring to something different from what exists now in EI for birth parents and adoptive parents, something that would require changes?

There are always major concerns by the countries from which these children come. When I was the Minister for International Cooperation and visited developing countries in Africa and other places, the major concern was that the developed countries were always keen to take children, but those countries didn't want lose their children. They didn't want them to be sent away en masse to other countries. They wanted to raise them. They wanted help to keep their children.

So that's another way of looking at it. There is a bit of an ethical issue that we really need to look at that is very real. I think we need to address that as well as the other.

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

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Thanks to the member for that series of questions. I'll try to do the best I can.

Obviously for humanitarian crises, we're not just talking about climate change. There may be other situations that arise: famine,

natural disasters, or war. These, of course, are situations that produce a number of parentless children.

I think one of the important reasons for examining how we do adoption is to reconcile... I shouldn't say reconcile, probably, but renovate. It is to renovate, ultimately, how we do adoption here in Canada to accommodate the reality that these are increasing trends. Is the current system nimble enough, if you will, to respond, and are the supports sufficient to allow that to happen?

I encourage us to think proactively about these situations rather than reactively. I think we did a fair job with respect to Haiti, but that was responding to a situation. How do we look ahead now, knowing these situations will occur in the future? Can we create a system, together with our partners at the provincial and territorial level, that will allow us to respond nimbly?

The other issue, of course—and I think I made mention of it in my comments—is that obviously, as a priority, you want to see children placed with families in their own countries, but where that can't happen, can our system accommodate bringing them into families here who would like to adopt?

With respect to the other issue, I'm getting at an equivalent benefit to maternity. I think the government has made a step forward in the sense that the self-employed now have the opportunity to opt into parental maternity benefits. The next obvious question that has to be asked, both for the self-employed and for those who are not self-employed, is: should we be looking at some additional benefit that would, through special EI benefits, recognize that there are significant challenges to adoptive parents and children in forming attachment? They need sufficient time and means to do that, in my opinion.

I think that was an area that, as I heard in the speeches at second reading, there was a unanimous thought around. I suspect that will emerge as a recommendation from this committee in whatever report comes out, but there are real and significant challenges, both for parents and for children, in forming those attachments in a situation of adoption. For biological children, some of that attachment begins during the pregnancy, so you have—

● (1545)

**Hon. Maria Minna:** I'm sorry, but if I could interject for a minute, Mr. Watson, are you suggesting that for adoptive parents the period or the program we would give would be special and different from what parental leave is now?

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** No, this would be in addition to parental leave. There's a maternity benefit, which is 15 weeks beyond the parental. Parental can be shared between two—

**Hon. Maria Minna:** So you would make it beyond...? You would add to it?

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** —but maternity can't be extended to adoptive parents, for obvious reasons. There's even jurisprudence, I think, around that; it can't be called "maternity". But is there some equivalent benefit, some additional weeks beyond parental leave, that would be available to recognize the significant challenges around attachment?

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Thank you.

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Thank you.

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

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Watson, I was going to talk about my experience with adoption here and get your view on that. I have both a brother and a sister who have adopted, one here in Canada, one in China—different circumstances, but in some cases, similar challenges.

I want to get a sense from you of what you expect of this committee. You've outlined it a bit, to be bold, etc., but when this came to the House, I had a chat with you about this because I wasn't sure exactly where this was going to go, and I think it's a worthwhile study. But this committee does have a number of things on its plate. What are your expectations? What would you like to see the committee do in terms of time in studying this motion?

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** I have some difficulty answering the question only insofar as I respect that the committee—

**The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco):** I would suggest, perhaps, Mr. Watson that you answer that question—

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Oh, I'm sorry, Madam Vice-Chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco):** —as you manage the other questions that you're going to have. I'm sorry, but I have to cut you off.

I'll now go to Madam Beaudin.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you for coming here, Mr. Watson.

As you know, I did rise in the House to speak to your motion. I am pleased with it as it calls for measures that respect Quebec and provincial jurisdictions. I would like to know if you have any information about the costs associated either with an international adoption or with the adoption of a child here in Canada.

• (1550)

[*English*]

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Thank you to the member for the question.

I don't know if I have the exact cost, because that will vary by jurisdiction, but it can be a significant cost, particularly when you're getting into international adoption, which can be extremely costly. You could be running as high as \$30,000 or \$35,000 for an international adoption. But certainly it's not unrealistic to be spending \$10,000 to \$15,000 with respect to adoption. I think there are other witnesses who can provide more detailed information by jurisdiction on how that goes.

There will be some opportunity for this committee as well to take a look at adoption across the country, and one of the reasons that I think it would be good for this committee is that best practices can be looked at as well. In particular, the Province of Quebec is quite ahead of the rest of the country in this regard, and there may be some lessons learned for the committee in looking at how they handle the issue of adoption.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** Thank you very much.

When you spoke to your motion when it was tabled in the House of Commons, you talked mainly about—as is also the case today—employment insurance as a component of maternity benefits. In Canada, however, adoptive parents are not eligible for 15 weeks of employment insurance.

Is that correct?

[*English*]

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** That's correct, though that may not be the only fiscal consideration for the committee in terms of what supports are offered. But certainly, while parental leave is a good starting place for families who adopt children, there are some really difficult challenges, particularly given the older the child is who is being adopted. We could be dealing with multiple caregiver issues, or perhaps prolonged attachment to a biological parent, before there's placement with an adopted family. The older the child is when that happens, of course, the tougher the trauma is of leaving a biological parent.

Attachment is the key issue. If we look at it with an eye to the successful attachment of children and parents, and an equivalency—no distinction, if you will—between biological parenting and biological children and adoptive parenting and adopted children, I think we've really hit the mark there. I would go further. Perhaps you could make an argument that the attachments are far more difficult with adoptive parenting, such that—

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** You have partially answered my question and since our time is limited, I would like to ask you one final question, if that's okay with you.

I agree that financial considerations are important, but I would also imagine that you would like parents to have access to services before and after the adoption. Quebec treats adoptive parents the same way as biological parents. Adoptive parents have access to parental benefits. Before and after the adoption, they are even eligible to receive psychological support from our youth centres, as well as being eligible for a refundable tax credit covering 50% of adoption-related expenses, up to a maximum of \$10,000.

What concerns me in particular is the fact that your motion claims to recognize and respect provincial and territorial jurisdictions. If this committee is prepared to hear you and recommend measures, I'd like to know if you are prepared to allow Quebec, in this motion, to have the right to withdraw unconditionally from any proposed measures with full compensation.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** I'll have to think about that, because that ultimately would be a decision for what government does with recommendations in terms of how they handle that particular issue. I don't know if it's germane for me, as a sponsor of a motion, to begin to wade into that. Yes, I think I would leave it for our government to answer how they would handle that.

But with respect to post-adoption supports and funding, you've suggested that the tax code may be one way, in terms of a tax credit. I suggested that the entire issue could be put on the agenda, either for first ministers or for relevant ministers to discuss in the next year or so. The tax code may not be the only way to do it. It could be some sort of a funding formula that could be worked out, I don't know. There could be other ways of looking at the issue that would provide support to allow it to be considered. I'll leave the answer at that, though.

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Chow.

[*English*]

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** Thank you.

I have a series of questions. I will ask them all and you can pick one.

Right now some parents have been waiting for their adoptions from the country of Nepal. They were told there is a suspension going on. Some of these parents have been waiting for many years. For this country, Nepal, perhaps there were some problems previously, but some of the 2009 adoptions need to be finalized. My office received some calls about that, so I am using this as an example of occasional situations where Canadian families who want to adopt children from some countries lose that opportunity. This could be one of the areas we could study, but Nepal is definitely a problem.

The number two area that I can flag is that the immigration committee last year discussed the issue of how second-generation children, if born abroad, could become non-citizens. For example, if I am born outside of Canada and my adopted child happens to be living in Beijing and has a child there, my granddaughter will become stateless. She will not be a Canadian citizen. That would apply only to adopted kids who come into the country as landed immigrants. This is an area that's a problem. A lot of parents with adopted kids say that it's not fair for their children if they end up having children outside Canada. This is a second area that we might consider.

There is a third area that may be worthy of discussion. I know that a lot of the children's aid societies across Canada—especially the one in Toronto, for example—are looking for foster parents, especially in some of the ethnic communities. Some kind of countrywide promotion of people who want to be foster parents may be an area that this committee or the federal government can look at.

The fourth area that I think may be of interest, and on which I want your comment, is that I know that a higher percentage of teenagers who are from foster homes sometimes get into trouble and end up leaving home. Some of them have great difficulty finding housing when they turn sixteen, so housing for kids who are from adopted or from foster care homes is an area that this committee can possibly look at.

I thought I would present those four areas that came to my mind and see if you can comment on any of them.

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Thank you to the member for the questions.

I'm not sure that I've considered all of those issues myself in putting forward the study. Let me just say first and foremost that ultimately the committee can and will determine in which direction they can go.

There are probably 50 or 100 different issues that have some bearing on adoption or are at least peripheral to it. My overarching sense of this—let me come back to that for a moment, if I could—was that we could examine the system both in terms of federal supports and in terms of the adoption system itself with an eye to seeing how that can be renovated to the new realities. My concern is that the system has some deficiencies, ultimately; it was created for a different time period. Some of these areas may get looked at by the committee. I don't know what you're going to ultimately choose, but how do we bring that system into the 21st century?

Ultimately, I think, I would like to see this put high on the agenda for either a first ministers meeting or for the relevant ministers to begin to look at how we would do this in partnership, because it can't be done in isolation. I know that the study will make recommendations to the federal side only, but looking at how we bring this into the 21st century will require a partnership moving forward.

Those were my original considerations, but it will touch on a number of areas, obviously. It could touch on areas like immigration policy. I think I mentioned in my opening statement the particular concern about how we encourage the consideration of adopting older children. There is typically a preference among parents for an infant or for someone young enough... There are all kinds of challenges.

At one point in our quest to adopt children, my wife and I considered, because my wife is a sign-language interpreter, whether or not we would consider a young deaf child, or an older deaf child, for that matter, because of our ability to meet the language needs. This could go in a number of directions, and I'll be interested to see what the committee ultimately settles on.

If I may add to that, I know that Mr. Savage asked about duration. I don't know how many meetings this will take, but I just don't want it to be a quick study that could miss some of the meaty substance of some of these issues. I know that the calendar can get quite crowded, but hopefully there will be a good amount of time spent on this, both to give it profile and to get into some of the weighty issues in front of the committee.

• (1600)

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** Do you see the next step being this committee listing three or four key areas and then submitting a report? Because I see this overlapping in some areas, such as Foreign Affairs—which country we should get adopted kids from and which we should—and immigration, etc. So maybe a list and what the parameters of the study are...would that be the first report?

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Are you contemplating...?

Sorry, Madam Chair, I don't know if she's contemplating more reports than one. I wasn't quite sure.

Obviously at the beginning the committee will want to scope out the parameters of its study and apportion a certain number of meetings to the areas they'd like to go into. I don't know if I'll comment to the committee on where they want to go with that. I think I've given you the big picture of what I'd like to see a study incorporate and, obviously, the encouragement to think bigger rather than smaller. The ability to produce a landmark study here, I think, should not be missed by the committee.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll be sharing my time with Mr. Cannan.

I certainly appreciate this witness sharing his thoughts on this issue. I know that in many ways it's fairly personal.

If I were to break it into two areas as I'm listening to what you'd like to see happen, number one would be to examine the existing supports to see what may need to be done with respect to them and whether they need to be added to, augmented, or changed. That can be done through taxation, direct funding, amendments to the EI act, and that kind of thing. I would say these fall into the category of trying to bring it into the new century here. It's not necessarily big thinking, but that is one part of it.

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Yes. It would be to examine the existing supports provided by the federal level to parents who are looking to adopt children, as well as supports to offset some of the costs of raising children. Even the child tax credit provides support up until the age of 18, so even that has some bearing on adopting older children, for example. The committee may have an opinion as to whether it's sufficient or not sufficient, but it is a mechanism that goes beyond, say, the universal child care benefit, which is for children up to the age of six. It does take into account the reality of children over six.

So there are existing supports and I think it's worthwhile for the committee to look at those existing supports. Are they sufficient? Are there gaps? Should any be particularly augmented or not augmented? I would agree, Madam Chair, that this should form part of the study.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** That's one aspect.

The other and perhaps more difficult aspect is the issue of international adoptions and creating a specific class with respect to the classes in immigration. From everything I've seen, adoption is being handled provincially, through each of the provinces, and they have, I suppose, differing rules and procedures. Essentially, they do have the fact that it must be in the best interests of the child or the children, and that's fair.

The federal government has been involved primarily post-adoption, after the province, with respect to citizenship. Its involvement has been particularly in that area, and sort of augmenting what the provinces do, what they're able to do, and I guess probably what constitutionally they have a right to do.

So if you're going to move from that provincial jurisdiction into creating a new adoption class, it would seem to me that there might be some constitutional issues we would have to study. Perhaps,

depending on what the constitutional issues might be, any venture by the federal government into the adoption process might then require a form of collaboration or agreement with the various provinces, and therefore may not be something that can be done directly by legislation.

So that's a more problematic area, as I see it, but would you want us to study the constitutional possibilities, including the collaborative approach that might be taken with the provinces to achieve this unique class of adoption?

• (1605)

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Thanks to the member for the question.

Obviously there could be some real technical challenges. I'm not aware of all of them, nor am I aware of all the ones you mentioned specifically. The principle at play here is partnership, I think. Each level of government has a role to play with respect to adoption and fostering the necessary kinds of attachments. How do we respond to some of the humanitarian challenges as well?

I'm not necessarily suggesting that the federal government move into provincial areas. What I'm suggesting, certainly, and what I think the committee would be well within its right to suggest, is to first of all examine these studies. Don't be afraid of looking at some of the tough areas.

Ultimately, it would be fruitful to have either the relevant ministers or the first ministers have some discussion at some point about how we deliver adoption in Canada. What better way is there to respect the jurisdictions and yet foster the necessary partnership—if possible—around this topic than to have that happen at some point? I think it would also give some serious profile to adoption in Canada.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** One of the thoughts I had as you were speaking, notwithstanding that it's provincial in large measure, is that there obviously would be interprovincial mobility issues depending on where the child might be and where the parent might be. This may be another area that we might want to have a look at to see how it's working or not working, as between provinces.

When you answer that question, I'll pass this on to Mr. Cannan—if there is time.

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Madam Chair, let me just add that in the understanding of working collaboratively or in partnership, there are also opportunities for best practices, a point that I think I very briefly touched on.

There's a lot to be learned from various jurisdictions about what they do, including what supports they provide. It could be instructive for the federal government to see how certain provinces—particularly Quebec, as mentioned earlier—support parents with respect to adoption and post-adoption.

**Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for sharing your time, Mr. Komarnicki.



Thank you for coming here, Mr. Watson, and also for bringing your lovely bride with you, and for your passion for the issue.

All around the room we have stories of families, some of whom have not been able to have children and have tried to through in vitro fertilization, and others who haven't been successful there and have gone to adoption.

I have limited time. You mentioned the cost, which is something that has always boggled my mind. People always say that throwing more money at the problem is a solution. From your experience, what is the major delay and what is the reason for the high expense for processing adoptions? How can we work together to streamline, from the federal perspective, a more efficient process?

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** I'm not sure I have a comment on that, but obviously the cost range for adoption will vary by jurisdiction, and it will be even higher when we're talking about international adoption. I think it's relevant, in light of the question Mr. Komarnicki asked, that we're not starting from zero, either, which is why it's important to examine what supports are in place.

We have an adoption tax credit, which may have been initiated by a Conservative private member's bill, I think, at the time, but was instituted by a Liberal government. We've had additional measures that have come in since then. So governments have had a look. We're not starting at a zero position in terms of how we support the cost of adoption and for the supports that are provided to parents beyond that, but it is a costly venture.

• (1610)

**The Chair (Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC):** Thank you.

We'll go to our second round.

We'll begin with Mr. Savage, please.

**An hon. member:** We have about three minutes left.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** I don't have a question.

Raymonde, do you have a question?

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** No.

**The Chair:** Okay. We'll go to Mr. Cannan.

Did you have any—

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Sorry, but may I make a very quick comment?

**The Chair:** Sure.

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I don't want to sound insensitive, but it seems to me that the only role the Government of Canada has here, given that this is provincial jurisdiction, is the immigration role, which is what we do now. We only act on immigration now once the province has already done the family study; when the family has been approved, then we do the immigration thing. I know, because I've gone through it recently in my riding, that we don't approve the immigration until the province has done its piece. So that stays about the same.

The only other thing would be the EI, if we wanted to look at expanding it, but I don't see any role here that would be required other than what already exists.

So I'm not clear about what we're being asked to do here. That's my major comment. Because I think we have it, really, except for the EI part, which I suppose we could discuss.

I'm sorry, I don't mean...[Inaudible—Editor].

**The Chair:** Mr. Watson?

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** I thought that was a comment, so I'll leave it for the record.

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Okay.

**The Chair:** All right. Are there more questions?

Mr. Vellacott, go ahead.

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Watson, for being here. I much appreciate the heart and the passion that you bring to this. I think this is a huge thing that we can do in terms of our own country and as well from abroad.

A special class for adoption from abroad intrigues me a great deal. Tying in with Ms. Minna's remarks, what's your sense, from looking at and studying the situation overseas, of bringing about a refugee class for adoption, but also, as she rightly pointed out, of what we may call the ethical issue or component in terms of bringing children across? I know that there was a little bit of an incident that occurred in Haiti with some zealous people trying to help out these young children, and it was found later that there was some difficulty or reluctance or hesitancy on the part of the parents.

Are there issues like this that one needs to kind of look at as a prelude to this special adoption class for immigration?

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Thank you.

Yes. When we're looking at humanitarian situations, the primary consideration, of course, is not to run roughshod over any other country but to work in partnership with legitimate governments. The first priority has to be placing children from those countries with families in their own countries, but there may not be the capacity to do it. Beyond that, do we have a system that's nimble enough to allow us to then pair up families here in our country who are more than willing to adopt children from other countries and to give them the love, the attachment, and the affirmation they'd like to give them?

But the primary consideration has to be to place these children, where possible, with families in their own countries first. Beyond that, can we make that a reality here?

I don't know if that answers the question, Madam Chair.

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** I think I have about a half a minute to go, do I, Madam Chair?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** I guess the other question there, Mr. Watson, would be whether you see it as an issue of big concern. Maybe we're raising something that's more hypothetical, but are there issues in China and other places with couples dearly wanting children and maybe scooping in a little too quickly, too aggressively, and the agencies there? We have to check out those local situations, obviously, and governments that may have a fairly different view of life and children and so on.

• (1615)

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Anytime you either enact law or put a system in place, there are those who will try to take advantage of the situation. Certainly I think those are worthy cautions to be looking at. I think it would be entirely in our nation's character to be more generous in terms of our capacity to open our arms to children both domestically and from abroad.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Vellacott.

We'll go to Monsieur Paillé, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ):** Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak, Madam Vice-Chair. I am not a regular member of this committee, so this is a timely opportunity for me. The question arose as to whether the committee had the authority to consider this matter. Yet, here we are having this discussion.

I have firsthand experience with this issue. I have a Peruvian-born son who will soon be 30 years old. Thirty years ago, that is over a quarter century ago, Quebec had full jurisdiction with regard to the adoption procedures that we followed. Therefore, it should come as no surprise to you that we favour the status quo. That brings me to the matter of principles.

As many people have realized, international jurisdictions are quite clear. It is the responsibility of the “adoptive” country to verify if the parents are qualified to adopt children. Obviously, in my case, the answer was yes. Peru, not Quebec or Canada, was responsible for verifying that there were no restrictions on adopting the child. In such instances, it is a matter of preventing kidnappings and the kinds of rumours that may have circulated in the past. These countries are free to agree to or to oppose the adoption, to allow or not to allow people to remove children from the country. That is their prerogative. It is important to check everything carefully, because a child cannot be returned. Adopting a child is not a short- or medium-term commitment, but rather a lifelong one. The adopted child does not come with a guarantee and you cannot send a child back to their country of origin, like you would return a parcel through the mail.

Some very simple, basic principles need to be applied here. First of all, it makes no difference whether a child is a biological child or an adopted child. I've never seen any difference between my children. Some are my biological children, while others have been adopted. The adopted child should not be treated any differently. That child knows that he has been adopted, that the size of his hands, the colour of his skin, the shape of his eyes and the colour of his hair are different. He does not need to be made to feel different because of administrative procedures. If the mother of an adopted child receives less in the way of employment insurance benefits than a mother who gives birth to a child, then the adopted child will be made to feel that he is worth less. And the outcome will be the same if a

mother received specific benefits associated with an adopted child. Adopted children will think that it costs more to meet their needs. Regardless of what you do, the adopted child will always end up feeling as if he is second class. The same is true for the parents. As I see it, from the moment an adoption takes place, the person becomes a parent, end of discussion. There is no worse insult than to say to parents that one of their children is adopted, while the other is their biological child. At least I would consider that to be the worst offensive remark that anyone could make to me.

However, with respect to the tax credit to cover expenses, that is a different story. The expenses associated with a foreign adoption are staggering, whether it be the legal costs, translation costs or some other expense. However, once that child becomes part of the family, he must never be treated differently. Otherwise, the adverse effects on the child are enormous.

• (1620)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, Mr. Watson, Mr. Paillé used all of his time to ask you his questions. I understand that you have to leave as well, but I'd like to give you an opportunity to respond and, then we'll carry on.

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think it was by agreement that we would conclude at 4:15 to allow committee business at the back end.

I'm respectful of the committee's time—

**The Chair:** I was not aware of that.

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** —but allow me to make one concluding comment. I mentioned it in my speech as well. There is no difference between biological or adoptive parenting or in terms of the value of a child, whether biological or adopted, and I think we can all agree on that.

I think one of the questions for the committee to grapple with is how we look at fostering greater attachment in situations of adoption. There are some real challenges there. Perhaps the supports don't recognize at this point the sufficient time and ability to undertake that, so that may be a consideration.

In the end, I think we can agree that governments have an interest in the strongest family attachments possible. That has a great positive and overwhelming net benefit to society.

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

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you for being here. We appreciate your time.

We will ask our witnesses from the Adoption Council of Canada and the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa to come forward at this time. We have a few questions for them as well.

I'd like to thank our witnesses, Laura Eggertson and Barbara MacKinnon, for being here on such short notice.

Just so committee members are aware, there is an exhibit this week in Ottawa called the “Heart Gallery of Ottawa”. The Adoption Council of Canada is here. We felt that if we had a bit of time we'd make some time to hear from these folks on adoption and on the exhibit they've brought forward.

Thank you so much for being here.

Some information for the members has been distributed, and hopefully that will put this into some context, but what I'd like to do is just give the witnesses an opportunity to briefly share what they're doing. Then we'll have a brief opportunity for just one round of questioning.

We'd like to have the chance to hear what you're doing in Ottawa.

**Ms. Laura Eggertson (Board Member, Adoption Council of Canada):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Barbara and I are going to share some time here, but I just want to start by saying that we really welcome the committee's decision to look at this whole issue of what the federal government can do to support adoption in Canada. We do feel that a number of areas would really benefit from this study, and we would be happy to get back to you in more detail about those issues at a different time.

But today, we'll just tell you a little bit about the Heart Gallery. The Heart Gallery is a concept that was pioneered in the United States. The Heart Gallery of America began in 2001 in New Mexico. The idea is that local photographers donate their time to take portraits of children who are waiting for permanent families. These are children in foster care.

This has been quite successful in the United States, so we looked at doing it here because we need more innovative tools and solutions. There are many thousands of children in foster care who are legally free for adoption across Canada, but our domestic adoption rates are stagnating. They really haven't risen over probably the past decade, if not more. They're roughly in the range of 1,700 to 2,000 per year. We need other ways to attract potential adoptive families and to match these children with those families.

That's why we decided on this. We spoke to the Children's Aid Society here in Ottawa, because we are here in Ottawa. The Adoption Council of Canada is a national organization, but it's headquartered in Ottawa. We also knew that the Children's Aid Society here had a good track record of trying new things, reaching out, and being quite aggressive about trying to recruit parents. We hope this will be a pilot project.

On Thursday night here on Parliament Hill, we launched the gallery. We had portraits of 18 different children from right here in Ottawa who need permanent families. Some were in sibling groups; I think we had three sibling groups. Others were single children in need of permanent homes. The idea is that this gallery will tour—hopefully—in some federal government buildings, municipal buildings, private companies, or office buildings, to attract a different audience of adoptive parents and families who might not have thought about adopting these particular children, who might not have thought about opening their homes to another child in general, and who will then follow up with the Children's Aid Society here to go through the appropriate process if they decide they would like to adopt.

That's the idea behind the Heart Gallery. As I say, it's been quite successful. Some jurisdictions in the United States have seen the numbers of calls and requests from potential adoptive parents doubling. There have been matches made, with as much as 50% of the children pictured in the galleries placed or potentially matched in some areas, and between 25% and 40% in other jurisdictions. That's why we decided to do it here. We hope it will spread across the country.

• (1625)

**Ms. Barbara MacKinnon (Executive Director, Children's Aid Society of Ottawa):** I want to follow up on why the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa decided to participate in this exciting initiative. It really is about the fact that we persistently struggle in finding adoptive families for older children and sibling groups. When children come into care they often experience positive growth while they're in foster homes, but regardless of how positive their experience is, they are always wanting a “forever family”.

For them it is about what is going to happen when they leave care, when they leave the system. Who is going to be at their graduation? Who is going to help them move into their first apartment? Who is going to be there when their first baby is born? Who is going to help them figure out their finances? All of these are things that those of you who are parents in this room know. You parent forever, and children want to be children forever and have that support.

We are constantly challenged to find people who are willing to open their home to older children; there is this classic kind of picture of adoption with babies. So because of that, this innovative process was introduced to us by the Adoption Council of Canada. We were quite excited about it, because we've found that what works best for recruitment is child-specific recruitment—in other words, creating that personal connection. We know, with the studies in social marketing, that the use of Facebook and pictures is a way of creating a connection. We were very pleased when this option came forward to us.

I think the piece we liked the best, and what was really positive for us, is that the children we approached to see if they were interested in being a part of this gallery felt very excited about it. They felt that they were part of the process. They first of all have to agree that they want to participate.

When older children are in adoption, they can be your partners in finding the adoptive family of their choice. This gallery provides them the option. They have these pictures that capture the essence of who they are. They write their own little biography about who they are and what they can offer family, recognizing that they have something to bring into a family. As well, they have the opportunity to really feel they are trying to make a difference to their own lives.

It has been a very positive experience to date in terms of the reaction of the children to this process, so we're feeling very positive. We hope that in your discussions there is the recognition that there is something different about adoption and that there is a need for children to be adopted, that every child in Canada needs a family, and, within that, that we need to be creative about how we find those families and how we support those families in preparation and the ongoing role of being an adoptive parent.

We look forward to seeing the results of your report.

• (1630)

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

Certainly you have a lot to offer all of us when it comes to adoption issues. When we're doing our formal study on this, I think it would be very beneficial to bring you back and have you prepare a report for us.

We're going to have only one round of questions. I will give each group seven minutes.

If you'd like to divide it between the parties, you could all ask a question and still get to the committee business we'd like to do.

Mr. Savage, you will have seven minutes. If you'd like to divide it, you could.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** I'm very happy to share the time with my colleagues.

Thank you for coming here today. Some of the questions that I would ask you are questions we would ask you as witnesses in this study, even though we're just at the beginning of it.

I think there are people who would be surprised to hear that there are a lot of children waiting to be adopted. There's a sort of a common feeling out there that it's hard to adopt a child. Can you give me a sense of how long it takes, of how many children are available and what is the process is for adoption? It probably makes sense to look at Ontario, since that's where we are.

Can you just give me a sense of the numbers of children waiting to be adopted at different ages and how long it takes to adopt a child?

**Ms. Laura Eggertson:** Madam Chair, I thank the member for the question.

First of all, let me explain that we have a hard time getting good statistics in Canada about adoption, particularly about domestic adoption. Part of the problem is that every province, of course, keeps its own statistics and classifies the children perhaps a little differently in terms of their legal freedom for adoption.

I can tell you, according to some old statistics, that we think there are between 70,000 and perhaps 100,000 children in care, but not all of them are legally free for adoption. We figure that between maybe 30,000 and 40,000 are legally free for adoption across Canada. In Ontario, the latest figures from the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies say that there are about 9,400 children and youths who are legally free for adoption. That's from infants all the way up to 18-year-olds.

**Ms. Barbara MacKinnon:** If I may, I will just add that the majority of children who are available for adoption through

children's aid societies are older. The average age for when a child comes into care as a crown ward is usually between nine and eleven years; they've been in and out of care for periods of time before they have legal status as a crown ward of the province. There is a small group of children who are under the age of six; they're babies and they become adoptable earlier. But then there is generally a much larger group of older children.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** So generally infants are quite easy to place...?

**Ms. Barbara MacKinnon:** Yes, very—we don't have to use these types of strategies for the younger population.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** So if we don't have a lot of statistics and surveillance on where we are on adoptions and how many children are available, or if you're saying we have old statistics, one assumes, then, that one of the purposes of a study would be to identify that as a weakness and do something nationally to understand where we are, province by province or region by region.

• (1635)

**Ms. Laura Eggertson:** Madam Chair, collecting those figures, identifying them, and having them broken down by age and status across each province would be extremely useful to everyone in the adoption and research community.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** I wonder, then, if we're looking at the issues of adoption as raised by Mr. Watson, if there is a jurisdiction—a country, state, province, or somewhere—that does a very good job at this and that we would want to look at and perhaps talk to. Do you know of any?

**Ms. Laura Eggertson:** There are many jurisdictions that are doing a good job, both inside and outside of Canada. There are many best practices, as was discussed by Mr. Watson today.

I'm particularly familiar with what's going on in the United States right now. They have been much more aggressive with many of their recruitment ideas in many U.S. states. For instance, there's an agency in New York City called "You Gotta Believe!" and its sole purpose is to move young people who are aging out of the foster care system and place them in permanent homes. They have found adoptive families for young people who are 18, 19, 20, or 21.

Generally in Canada—and maybe Barbara can correct me—there has been a feeling amongst both the general population and the workers in the children's aid societies that these young people, these teens, are not adoptable, but I think we can change that. Certainly the Adoption Council of Canada has a philosophy—and I think it's shared by the Children's Aid Society here in Ottawa—that no child, no young person, is unadoptable.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** I saw on your website, I think, something along the lines of there being some 300 teenage children in British Columbia available for adoption. It said that there are no unwanted children, there are only unfound parents, or something to that effect. Is that one of your—

**Ms. Laura Eggertson:** I think that's particular to B.C., but it's exactly the same philosophy. In fact, it's our belief that when families find out who is available specifically through some of the pictures, the photo listings, and the portrait gallery, they are drawn to individual children and young people, and that makes it much more real for most people.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll go to Madam Beaudin, please.

Monsieur Paillé?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Daniel Paillé:** We will share our time, since I'm the adopted member of the committee for the day.

I find what you have done to be very interesting, and no doubt you will have answers to the questions that I am about to ask you, although I am a little skeptical. After reading the documents, a number of warning bells went off in my head. Given that 30,000 children are awaiting adoption, I'm concerned that a photo exhibit like this one will turn into a kind of market. No doubt when it came to photographing some children as opposed to others, you followed certain criteria. And no doubt that you will follow certain guidelines when the time comes to select the photographs of children that will be one display—I'm somewhat uncomfortable with that expression—in the exhibit. I'm sure that other criteria apply to the opening of the exhibit. As everyone knows, some spots on the exhibition floor are more important or popular than others. Not all exhibit spaces are of equal value. No doubt you have had to comply with the photographer's requirements, whether it be in terms of colour, or black and white photographs, size, and so forth.

I would like you to reassure me a bit on that score, since I'm concerned that the exhibition will be a little like the classified ads. I'm very skeptical about the whole process. That's my only question.

[*English*]

**Ms. Barbara MacKinnon:** The challenge with doing a recruitment strategy like this is that you have to find the balance between making sure the message gets out there, which is that there are children who are looking for families, and creating those personal connections that will draw people in, and maintaining the integrity and privacy of the individual without putting anyone at risk.

The gallery we have is very beautiful. There is that kind of a mix, so I'm not quite sure if you're speaking of what we're doing... That's what we feel the major process is really about: what you do to prepare the children for it and the inclusion of them in that process. It's similar to what we do to include children in their journey towards adoption. It's a piece of that, to include them in the process, and to prepare them for the eventuality.

As well, a lot of it is about making sure that you do appropriate screening and have the checks and balances in place to ensure that it isn't a marketplace, that it really is more of a drawing of attention to a critical issue. But it's a constant balance that we take at the society, knowing that we could have more children adopted if we were farther out there in terms of trying different strategies, but wanting to

ensure that every child does get adopted. Research shows that these methods are very effective at being able to do that.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** First of all, thank you very much for coming here.

I think it's a little hard for us to envision this photo gallery. I'm concerned that families who claim to be interested... I don't quite see the difference between adoption, in your case, where you become a host family... However, if I understand correctly, you would like host families to be there permanently.

Are you not worried that all kinds of families might show up? What procedure will be followed if a family expresses an interest in adopting a child? What steps will be taken to ensure that this is a safe family for the child?

I would also like to know if you are satisfied with Mr. Watson's motion. Putting it another way, would you like the committee to bring in measures to encourage other families to adopt?

[*English*]

**Ms. Barbara MacKinnon:** I'll answer the question about what happens once somebody identifies an interest.

We have an extensive screening process and an education process that families go through to ensure that they are ready to adopt. It ensures that they have a full understanding of the complexities and challenges of adopting older children and that they recognize the importance of respecting the child's history and where they have come from. It's an extensive training program as well as a screening program. All the appropriate checks and balances are in place in terms of safety and security issues, records checks, interviews, and resumé's. It is a very challenging process.

The second piece is a really important piece. You can have people who are available and interested in being parents, but the most important piece is making sure that this parent matches that child and will be appropriately supportive in the development of the child, based on the needs and wants of that individual child. It's not just about having people come in the front door. There is extensive screening to make sure they are able to parent. Then there's another round of decisions about who they would best parent. Then there is the process of introducing them to the children and the children deciding whether these people are appropriate.

Compared to an international adoption, this is a much more intrusive process, here in Canada, that has a number of checks and balances in place.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** What is the failure rate?

**Ms. Barbara MacKinnon:** Excuse me?

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** What is the failure rate?

[English]

**Ms. Barbara MacKinnon:** We have a very low failure rate of adoption matches. We have approximately 80 to 100 adoptions a year. In a year, we may have one to two adoption disruptions that occur here in Ottawa, and they're not necessarily disruptions in the adoptions done that year. It's a very small number.

**Ms. Laura Eggertson:** Madam Chair, I could answer the second part of the question, if you like, about how we feel about the motion.

• (1645)

**The Chair:** Sure.

**Ms. Laura Eggertson:** We'd be very happy to work with the committee, as I said, and we're very supportive of the motion. We think there are a number of areas where the federal government could be active in terms of supporting adoption and adoptive families, including the EI issue, but there are many others.

In fact, we think it's important for the federal government and federal politicians to show some leadership and work with the provinces. For instance, it's much harder right now to adopt interprovincially, from one province to another, than it is to adopt internationally, and we think that's really unacceptable. We'd like to see a memorandum of understanding worked out among the provinces to lower some of those barriers.

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

We'll go to Mr. Martin.

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

To follow up on that question and answer, are there other things that happen in this country—federally, provincially, or interprovincially—that get in the way of your work in terms of matching good parents with children? Those are the kinds of things that I would see us looking into and maybe uncovering. Then we could come up with some responses that would be helpful.

**Ms. Laura Eggertson:** Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Martin.

We see a number of potential barriers to adoption. I speak also as an adoptive parent and an adoptee. I adopted two older children through the Children's Aid Society here in Ottawa.

Awareness is one of the biggest barriers. As was mentioned, lot of people don't know how many children are available for adoption in Canada. They don't know the ages. They don't think that it necessarily would be possible for them to parent an older child. One of the issues is post-adoption support. There are ways... We have a couple of different adoptive parents support groups in Ottawa that are just volunteer-run groups, but they're doing a lot of parent-to-parent education. That kind of support, more widely available throughout Canada, is very helpful. Various supports in terms of...

We're not asking for special supports for adoptive parents in terms of EI. We would like equal supports for biological and adoptive parents. That means we would like to see not just the parental leave that adoptive parents can now qualify for, but also to have adoptive parents be able to qualify for the same number of weeks, because of some of the attachment issues that I think you've heard a little about. We can talk about that more at a later date.

Just the awareness, though, just promoting adoption as an option... When we talk about permanency, we're talking about legal adoption, but we also may be talking about kinship care among the aboriginal communities, legal guardianship, and custodial care. We have a number of options, but the intent is that children do not have to be moved from foster home to foster home throughout their time in the child welfare system.

Again, we have a number of areas where we think the federal government could be helpful, even just with a national campaign that would raise awareness of adoptive families, of people who have adopted and how successful that's been, to show that it is an option at different ages and stages.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** Okay.

I'm sure you're aware of this as well. One of the issues that often comes into my office is the issue of kinship adoptions, where a grandparent, for example, will take on responsibility for a grandchild, but with very little support. If those children went into care, a whole lot of support would go along with it. When the grandparents decide to do so in Ontario, they have to apply to welfare for support, and it's really significantly less. Is supporting kinship adoption something that you at the Children's Aid Society are behind?

**Ms. Barbara MacKinnon:** Yes, just to add, in response to your question... These are critical issues, because for us, for these children or sibling groups, what we see is that it's a spectrum of permanency we're looking for. One thing that could happen through this committee is to really look at creating a level playing field across the country as it relates to adoptions or legal custody arrangements with kin family.

For example, a grandparent may take on the challenges of taking care of that grandchild, or an aunt may do it, but except for intermittent supports there aren't mechanisms to provide ongoing support for the role they play. That means we end up having children languishing in care because of those issues.

So we would really see it as a benefit for this committee to look at the differentials across the provinces, because there are other provinces recognize the importance of kin adoption and legal custody.

• (1650)

**Mr. Tony Martin:** In terms of creating a bigger pool of people to find and take in children, are there any written or unwritten rules, for example, in the case of single parents or gay couples or those sorts of cases? What has been the experience there? Would that be worth looking at?

**Ms. Barbara MacKinnon:** Yes, very much so. We are open at the Ottawa Children's Aid Society and recognize that it's about who is the best parent and what the parent can offer, regardless of their sexual orientation or whether they're a single parent. So we have been very successful. You'll see that the studies really reflect that in terms of the openness of different groups being able to parent well.

But again, it would be a similar issue. At this point, it's defined and studied at a local level, and having some provincial or federal guidelines would benefit and open the door to more options being available for the children.

**The Chair:** We'll now go to Mr. Lobb, please.

**Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC):** Thank you. I'll share my time with Mr. Vellacott.

How many children over the age of 13 are looking to be adopted at any one time in Canada?

**Ms. Barbara MacKinnon:** As we mentioned earlier, we don't have the specific numbers because the numbers are difficult to say... But I think that if we look at the figure of 30,000 who are waiting, I would say that probably at least 60% to 70% of them would be older children over the age of 9 or 10—as an estimate.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** This leads to my second question. We're studying poverty right now in this committee. Have there been any studies done of these children, of that 70% of the 30,000? What is their success rate if they aren't adopted? What's their history or what does their future look like?

**Ms. Laura Eggertson:** I can answer that. There have been some studies. The Manitoba Centre for Health Policy has done some recent studies. Being in the child welfare system is a huge risk factor for dropping out of school, for having to rely on social assistance, and for teenage pregnancy. That's only one study that looked at it in Manitoba. Being in the child welfare system was one of the factors that influenced those outcomes, but there have been numerous studies. B.C. has done one about young people coming into the criminal justice system who have been in foster care.

It's not just... I'm sorry; I should distinguish here. It's not the fact that these children are in foster care that puts them at higher risk for these problems; it's what they've suffered before they came into foster care and the fact that they don't have permanency that make the difference.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** That leads to my third question, and then I'll turn it over to Mr. Vellacott, but I guess that's what we could all deduce there.

There's a huge cost once your kids get into their teenage years, with driving and with college or university, so obviously an adoptive family would have to be willing to make those financial commitments. Are there any provinces that recognize the financial commitment that would take? If there are, it would be great to hear about them. Or would it be a useful suggestion to take a look at that?

**Ms. Laura Eggertson:** That would be extremely useful, because the different provinces have different ideas about subsidies. There is nothing standardized across the country. Even within some provinces, there's nothing standardized.

For example, Ontario has no guaranteed subsidies if you are adopting a child with special needs, or an older child, or anything... In fact, I think Barbara will say that the children's aid societies do not have a budget per se. They do not have a budget item to provide those kinds of subsidies or post-adoption support. They kind of cobble it together sometimes, out of their own budgets, where it's needed.

But some other provinces... Alberta, I believe, has a guaranteed subsidy, for example, for parents who are adopting children with particular needs. One of those needs may simply be being an older child or in a sibling group.

So yes, there's a wide range of options across the country. In fact, Ontario had a report that came out this summer and looked at those issues. It's called "Raising Expectations". It speaks to the issue just in Ontario, but it would be very helpful to know what the situation is in each province and to look at ways of equalizing that support.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** Okay. Thank you.

● (1655)

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** Thanks for being with us. I look forward to your possible appearance again, Laura and Barbara, at a future time when we can get into more of the details of obstacles you presently see and some of the other difficulties in the system and where we might ease that.

I have a younger brother whose oldest is an adopted son. He's a wonderful teenaged young man at this point and is a great hockey player and all those kinds of things. They weren't able to have children, so that's why they proceeded with the adoption. After they adopted him, they conceived and had two children. Sometimes that's the way it works, it seems.

Anyhow, this gal was from the other end of the country, this young gal in her late teens, and she felt that she was not able to be the mom and provide the kind of support context for the young baby, so they made the choice. It was a good thing for her and, obviously, for them as well.

I guess that gets to my two questions. The second is about open adoption, its track record, and what you're finding to be the assessment of it over these many years. The other thing is, do you have ways, either through the Adoption Council of Canada or children's aid societies, of promoting adoption to university gals, late teenage gals, or otherwise—older than that as well—who are caught in unplanned pregnancies?

I appreciated your little statement before in terms of there being no unwanted child, only unfound parents, and I believe that really is true. When gals maybe don't feel able to carry...maybe that would be their first choice, but they feel they can't, or are troubled or uneasy with proceeding to an abortion, do you have ways to promote that in a university context across our country, to let them know of the real possibility of adoption, and the open adoption as well?

**Ms. Barbara MacKinnon:** I can speak to open adoption. We feel very strongly that if the child is older and has a strong sense of their past, the more open an adoption is, the more chance an effective bonding will occur. We've seen that happen on a regular basis with adoption.

People want to know their past, and they want to have relationships with significant individuals in their lives, even if they cannot live with them. So it's a very conscientious effort we make, based on, of course, the skills or the circumstance of why a child is in our society. We mediate openness agreements between the potential adoptive parents, the birth parents, and the child, based on their age and experience, so it is a very effective way of ensuring a lasting relationship.

**Ms. Laura Eggertson:** We do not currently reach out to university students or to anyone in particular to say that adoption is an option except in the sense that, as the Adoption Council of Canada, we try to promote adoption as an option to anyone. We represent birth parents as well as adoptees and adoptive parents.

Part of our challenge is funding. We don't actually receive any support from any provinces, with the exception of Alberta, which gives us \$10,000 a year towards our Canada's Waiting Children program. We're constantly struggling to find funding.

We would like to be able to promote adoption as an option more effectively across the country to everyone; we're not going to target a particular population, I don't think, but we are looking at trying to raise the funds for a national campaign identifying, perhaps, prominent Canadians who have benefited from adoption, and making it more high profile as an issue. We would love to see people like yourselves talking about it more often, just talking about the issue of the children who are in child welfare systems across Canada and the fact they need homes.

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

I just wanted to clarify this with the committee members. Before I arrived, I understand that you decided we would go until a quarter past five today, which means that we would have a little more time for questions. Because you came to that agreement when I was not in the chair, I wanted—

Yes, Madam Folco.

• (1700)

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Actually, I was chairing, as you know, in your absence, and from what I understood of the discussion, it had already been discussed that we would stop at a quarter past five to go into committee business. What we suggested is that we start 15 minutes earlier so that we would stop at five o'clock to have committee business for half an hour. Is this correct?

Just check with the other committee members.

**The Chair:** Let me just check.

No...?

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** *[Inaudible—Editor]*...last 15 minutes.

**The Chair:** Prior to five o'clock? So 15 minutes seems to be what it was. Well, then, if it's okay with the witnesses, I will just see if there are any more questions. Maybe we'll give each of the parties two minutes just so we can keep within our timeframes.

Madam Minna.

**Hon. Maria Minna:** I'll be very quick. I just wanted to clarify something from Ms. Eggertson.

Earlier you mentioned custodial care. I'm not quite sure what that is. That's one question. If you could answer that, I'll ask you the other one afterwards.

**Ms. Laura Eggertson:** There are various forms of care arrangements. For instance, in the aboriginal community where adoption may not be named as such, there is often a way of reaching a custodial care agreement with either a family member or a band member willing to permanently raise that child.

We're talking about a range of permanency options that mean something different depending on the community in which they are negotiated.

Is that correct, Barbara?

**Ms. Barbara MacKinnon:** Yes.

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Here's my other question. You mentioned that you have adopted two children, and you also at one point mentioned older children. I wondered about two things. Could you tell us what you mean by older children? Also, what is the success with adoption of older children in terms of adjustment within families?

I think people might be a little hesitant because they might think the children are set in their ways or that the adjustment period might be harder than it would be with a younger child. I'm wondering if there are any studies to that effect.

**Ms. Laura Eggertson:** Sure. I can speak to that. And Barbara is also an adoptive parent.

My children were eight and nine respectively when I adopted them. There are definitely issues of attachment, as was discussed. These children have known their birth families; it's not like the situation of an infant. I was adopted myself as an infant, but I don't have any memories of my birth family. Children who come into care when they have been in their birth families for some period of time, and who then eventually become legally free for adoption, have memories. They often have had visits in the past. They may have siblings. They may be separated from siblings. Their whole conception of family is a little more complicated, perhaps, than the situation when you're adopting an infant.

Primarily, in my view and in my experience, the issues that are difficult are issues of trauma rather than issues of adoption. The children don't come into the Children's Aid Society just because their parents were killed in a car accident, necessarily; there is usually some reason why they are not with their family of origin. Those reasons may be very difficult for the children. That is often what plays out in their adoptive families.

I think adopting older children can be extremely successful, but the parents need to be well supported. I did it as a single parent and I know that I had a lot of help from the Children's Aid Society here in Ottawa. It really made a difference for me.



The other thing is that issues can emerge, as they can for any children growing up in a family. Whether you are the biological parent or the adoptive parent, there are things you may or may not be prepared for, and you may need to be flexible. You may need to adjust your expectations and you may go through difficult patches sometimes, but with enough support, I think these can be very successful placements and adoptions.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Monsieur Paillé.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Daniel Paillé:** Briefly, let me just say that regardless of whether a child is adopted or not, the adolescent crisis phase is unavoidable. Whether a child was adopted at two months or at 10 years of age, the time will come when he wants to know his parents' identity. At some point, he wants to see his parents.

I have a question about your photo gallery. Is your exhibition open to the public or do you screen the people who wish to view the photographs?

• (1705)

[*English*]

**Ms. Barbara MacKinnon:** It's open to the public. The screening process is for when people want to go further and get further information around pursuing adoption.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Daniel Paillé:** So then, it really is like a marketplace, like classified ads.

[*English*]

**Ms. Barbara MacKinnon:** I think what you're suggesting is the dilemma we're in, which is how you promote and engage people in adoption for older children and sibling groups in a respectful way. It can be challenging for people to feel comfortable with that modality. You're not wrong to ask the question; it's what agencies throughout North America have found in making these decisions. Which is worse? Is it worse to promote the fact that children are available to adopt or worse to consider letting children languish in care because we're not able to communicate? It's an interesting values dilemma that we all struggle with in reaching a decision.

In our agency, we have made the decision that if we're inclusive and respectful in how we do it, the issue is to ensure that we meet the expectations of the child, which is to have a forever family. If there are ways that we can do it without having to try these social marketing techniques, we would be happy to go forward with those ideas as well.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Daniel Paillé:** Will people be able to view the photos on the Internet?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but your time is up.

Mr. Martin, do you have any questions?

**Mr. Tony Martin:** No.

**Mr. Daniel Paillé:** Could I go back to my questions?

**The Chair:** Well, I think we had better just continue with our process.

We will thank the witnesses very much again for being here. Hopefully we'll be able to bring them back and we can have more of our questions answered when we're actually doing the formal report, but I think this is a great way to launch—

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** Am I not to going to get a chance to ask a question?

**The Chair:** Well, actually, you said you didn't have—

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** I did.

**The Chair:** Oh, I'm sorry. I was told that you didn't have any.

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** Did you say that?

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** I did.

**The Chair:** Yes.

So we'll thank our witnesses for being here and hopefully bring them back again.

*Merci beaucoup.*

We'll begin committee business. We have two motions to deal with. Both motions have been brought forward by Tony Martin.

Mr. Martin, would you like to begin with your motion that has to do with a study on disabilities?

**Mr. Tony Martin:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** I thought there was consensus around the room a couple of meetings ago that once we finished the adoption study, and once the report on poverty was tabled, we would move on to a fuller study on disabilities. We've been talking about this for quite some time.

Most of the people at the table were here during that period, and I don't think there's any question in anybody's mind but that this subject needs to be addressed. It's been a long time since we've done anything of any substance with it, so I simply move the motion that's on the piece of paper you have in front of you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Savage, please.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Thank you, Chair.

I'm not sure that we actually... I guess we do need a motion to do a study. I mean, we had a pretty solid consensus that we were going to do the disability issue next. I don't know what the specific angle is that we should take on that. I think we need to discuss with people in the community what specific issues they would like to see addressed.

Other members of the Liberal group have been on the committee when they've done issues of disability, but it has been some time since we've done it, and it's a hugely, hugely important issue when you look at the number of people who are not able to take part in the great wealth that is Canada. We need to do something on this, so absolutely, let's get on with it.

• (1710)

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

Mr. Komarnicki.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** I think you have general consensus about the fact that we should do the study. The only issue I might have is that the last part of the motion states as follows: "...determining at the outset the exact parameters of the study to ensure a clear focus with specific goals and a commitment to providing solutions with a high probability of success". I'm not sure how we get there, but it seems to me that we really need to study two things: the specific barriers that impede the quality of life of persons with disabilities and their full participation in the labour market and economy.

That would cover, I think, the range of possibilities, so I would like to move a friendly amendment to omit those words that are less than clear and substitute the part that would read "quality of life of persons with disabilities and full participation in the labour market and economy". That, it would seem to me, would cover the breadth of what we need to talk about. Then it would be up to the various players, I suppose, to add witnesses to those areas.

**The Chair:** Mr. Martin, are you open to a friendly amendment?

**Mr. Tony Martin:** Yes, I am, although when I get a chance I'd like to speak to it as well.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Komarnicki, could you just let us know clearly what your friendly amendment is?

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Okay.

I would strike everything after the word "disabilities", so it would read, then: "That this Committee, following its study on adoption issues, conduct a major study on a topic specific to barriers that impede the quality of life of persons with disabilities", and then I'd add the words "and full participation in the labour market and economy".

**The Chair:** I will just check with the mover of the motion first.

You're willing to accept a friendly amendment?

**Mr. Tony Martin:** Yes, I am, and I would argue that the last part that Mr. Komarnicki has asked to strike out will actually—if we do it properly—keep us on track and focused and looking at things that are realistic in terms of what can be delivered, both in the short term and the longer term.

As often happens in studies of this sort, we could get off into all kinds of places and issues that we may not be able to do a whole lot about, frankly, and that don't fall under the purview of the federal government in terms of recommendations that we might make. We might make recommendations that we know in our heart of hearts the government just isn't going to accept or is not going to be wanting to take any action on. All we're saying here is that we need to be clearly focused.

I like "full participation in the labour market and economy" and the first piece here. Those are certainly two areas that we could do a lot of very valuable work on. I would leave the last part in to make sure that's what we study, and that at the end of the day we come up with solutions that, as we say here, have a "high probability" of being successful.

**The Chair:** Just so I'm clear, if it's a friendly amendment, we can look at the motion with the friendly amendment in it.

Mr. Martin, are you agreeing, then, to Mr. Komarnicki's friendly amendment? We'd be looking at the motion with his amendment. I need some clarity on this so I know exactly what we're debating.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** I'm suggesting that I could accept Mr. Komarnicki's contribution as long as we leave the last piece in, which in his mind is not clear and in my mind is. It will keep us focused and hopefully get us to a place where we'll actually be able to make some recommendations that will indeed happen.

• (1715)

**The Chair:** So if that's acceptable... If not, we'll have to have a formal amendment.

Madam Folco.

**An hon. member:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]...the second sentence?

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** I would suggest that Mr. Martin—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Madam Folco. I called on you out of order. I have Mr. Savage next to speak to this.

But I do need clarity before we continue. I need to know if this is a friendly amendment that has been accepted as proposed. If not, if Mr. Komarnicki wants to present it as an amendment, we would then debate the amendment.

So will you accept his friendly amendment as proposed, which would strike out the last part—

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Madam Chair—

**Mr. Tony Martin:** I'd like to hear my colleagues on it.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Do you just have just a point of clarification, Ms. Folco?

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Yes, I do, Chair, through you to Mr. Martin. Is Mr. Martin asking to keep everything that he has in those two lines or is he just asking to keep "a commitment to providing solutions with a high probability of success"?

I would certainly be in favour of keeping the second possibility, because the first one is really in the hands of the committee as we move along anyway.

**The Chair:** Mr. Martin, would you be...?

**Mr. Tony Martin:** Yes.

Are you okay with that, Ed?

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Yes.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** That would be fine by me.

**The Chair:** Okay. That's good.

Mr. Savage, did you want to speak very briefly to the motion as amended?

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Yes, just in clarification. One of our key goals should be to make sure that we are able to bring people with disabilities into the labour market, but there are many people with disabilities who will never be able to fully participate in the labour market and who will require social supports and income supplements that will allow them to live a life with dignity without ever being in the labour market.

I want to make sure that we understand what we're saying there. I'm not very keen on suggesting that only people who can fully participate in the labour market are worthy of study and support.

**An hon. member:** I agree with that.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** I think that's fair.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** That's fair. The first part—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Komarnicki. Mr. Vellacott is next.

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** That was precisely the kind of point I was going to make, too. I have a son who has mental health issues and so on. Maybe I'm being pessimistic at this point and just bracing myself, but I doubt that he'll ever be fully involved “in the labour market and economy”.

But that doesn't in any way diminish his personhood, his value, or any of that, so I would be concerned if this last piece circumscribed it as people with disabilities only if they can engage in the labour market and economy. He will probably not be able to in the future, in that sense, and I would have a concern, as would my colleague Mr. Savage, in respect of that limitation or narrowing of a definition of quality of life for people with disabilities.

**The Chair:** Mr. Komarnicki.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** I don't mean to exclude what has been said when we're looking at barriers that impede the quality of life of persons with disabilities. It can cover a whole range of things, including the kinds of things that Mr. Vellacott talks about, but it ought not to exclude the portion that I specifically referred to. I think those two together would cover the gamut; if not, then I guess we should expand it.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Madam Chair—

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** I wonder if I could make a suggestion in terms of the language so that we can include Mr. Vellacott's and Mr. Savage's point, as well as Mr. Komarnicki's.

I just wondered about this: “That this Committee, following its study on adoption issues, conduct a major study on topics specific to barriers that impede the quality of life of persons with disabilities or”—instead of “and”—“full participation in the labour market and economy”. It's not very grammatical, but would that be suitable? It's just a one-word change so that you'd see this in?

**The Chair:** Mr. Martin, it's your motion. Would that be acceptable?

**Mr. Tony Martin:** Yes. I'm also concerned about the point raised by Mr. Savage and Mr. Vellacott, which is that we not leave people out, although I have to say that my read of it initially was that when we said “impede the quality of life of persons with disabilities”, that was covering everybody. Then we zeroed in on a specific piece, which was, at the end, “participation in the labour market and economy”, which is something that Mr. Savage raised previously as well.

I thought we had it covered. I would say that probably “or” instead of “and”, which is what I hear Madam Folco suggesting, would make it a bit more inclusive.

**The Chair:** Okay. I'm going to read the motion, and hopefully we can be in agreement on it: “That this Committee, following its study on adoption issues, conduct a major study on a topic specific to barriers that impede the quality of life of persons with disabilities or their full participation in the labour market and economy, and a commitment to providing solutions with a high probability of success”.

Does that sound good to everyone?

• (1720)

**Mr. Tony Martin:** I'm fine with that.

**The Chair:** Okay. Should we call the question?

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** I'll just interject. In setting up “or their full participation”, if I can just speak to that, it sounds like an either/or situation. Maybe for some people they need full participation in the labour market in order to have full quality of life; I don't think you can set it up as an “or”. I'm sure that's not what was meant.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Put “and/or”.

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** Add “and/“or””?

**The Chair:** We could do the “and/or”.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** Maybe we should take out “full”. How many people with disabilities will not...?

**Hon. Maria Minna:** This is true committee work here.

**The Chair:** All right. I'm going to read it again. Hopefully this will be satisfactory. It states: “That this Committee, following its study on adoption issues, conduct a major study on a topic specific to barriers that impede the quality of life of persons with disabilities and/or their full participation in a labour market with a commitment to providing solutions with a high probability of success”.

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** Maybe we could add “where possible”.

**The Chair:** Mr. Martin, does that sound good to you?

**Mr. Tony Martin:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Then we can vote. All in favour?

**An hon. member:** Define success.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. All in favour of the motion as amended?

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** Could you read it one more time, Madam Chair?

**The Chair:** Do you want me to read it one more time?

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** Yes, please.

**The Chair:** Okay.

It reads: “That this Committee, following its study on adoption issues, conduct a major study on a topic specific to barriers that impede the quality of life of persons with disabilities and/or their participation in a labour market with a commitment to providing solutions with a high probability of success”.

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** Could I just suggest one other thing that I think will be more helpful? Can we just say “and where possible” instead of “and/or”?

**The Chair:** I think “and/or their participation in a labour market” is in the spirit of what we are trying to say.

**Hon. Maria Minna:** That's fine. I mean, we're not going to change the price of the dollar today, so—

**The Chair:** But it's Mr. Martin's motion.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** That's fine. I'm okay.

**The Chair:** All right. I think we were voting on it, weren't we? Then I was interrupted. All in favour of the motion as amended?

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

**Mr. Michael Savage:** On a point of order, Chair, before we go on to Mr. Martin's second motion, and with his indulgence, pursuant to what we just passed, I wonder if I could just bring forward an idea that I mentioned to you last Friday about this study on disabilities.

**The Chair:** Mr. Savage, we'll address it. Would you be open to just looking at this motion first?

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Well, the thing is that we have five minutes in committee, and then the bells are going to go, or the committee is going to end in five minutes. This is time sensitive.

**The Chair:** Then go ahead. That's correct. We do have bells.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** I'll only do it with Mr. Martin's indulgence.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** Yes, that's fine.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Thank you, sir.

On Friday in Halifax I attended a celebration of Canada's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. At that celebration, I spoke with some of the local folks who are also involved nationally. We've all been invited to attend a celebration of Canada's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities next Wednesday, April 28, here in Ottawa, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. The minister is going to speak.

What was mentioned to me was that a number of the leaders in the disability community, from across Canada, are going to be in Ottawa that day. That's a Wednesday. So I broached this idea with them and said that I would bring it up with the committee. I was wondering, if we don't have something pressing that day, whether it might be an opportunity to meet with some of the leaders in the disability community next Wednesday to talk about our study and to get their views on how we might go forward. I bring that up for your consideration. That's why it's time sensitive.

**The Chair:** I will just let the committee know that next Wednesday we probably will have time and room in our schedule for them, because it's looking like we'll be able to deal with Bill C-395 and Bill C-308 in their entirety over the next couple of meetings. I'll just put that out there for the committee to consider.

Is it the will of the committee that we bring in these witnesses?

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Could I say one more thing, Madam Chair?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** These folks are the Council of Canadians with Disabilities and the Canadian Association for Community Living, so they are folks who are very involved in the disability community. When I mentioned to them that we may be studying this issue with our next study, they were very excited about it. So it wouldn't be a bad idea, even though the study won't have started, to

bring them in and get their ideas as to what things we should look at. That's why I brought it forward.

I thank all of you for your indulgence.

• (1725)

**The Chair:** Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** Yes, I think that's a good idea.

**The Chair:** A good idea all around?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** All right. Good. Then we'll go ahead and contact them and see if we can bring them in on the 28th.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Martin, I'm not sure if we're going to have time to look at this motion. We'll go over time, I guess. We can try to, anyway.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** I want to get a feel for the room. If people may need more time to think about it further, we can come back another time.

The motion kind of speaks for itself. In light of the fact that in the not too distant future we'll be tabling a very significant and important report on poverty in the House, the first question that will come back at us, of course, will be: how much is this going to cost?

I think we have to be ready with answers to that question. This motion is an attempt to have some work done by people who would have access to that information, so that we could all have it at our disposal and be ready to share it with people who would ask that question. We could then position ourselves to be able to have the government actually take our report seriously and perhaps move on it.

**The Chair:** Madam Folco, did you have a comment?

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Yes, thank you, Chair. I understood from reading the notice of motion that this was a request for the Treasury Board Secretariat to give us the information on what is happening right now. From what you've just said, Mr. Martin, I understand that you would like them to cost what we're going to be presenting in our poverty report. Am I wrong?

**Mr. Tony Martin:** What I'd like to know is what they are spending right now.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Okay. That's what I understood first of all.

**The Chair:** Does anybody else have a comment?

**Mr. Tony Martin:** The issue is that there is a cost to poverty. There is a cost to not doing anything about poverty.

**The Chair:** Would anybody else like to speak to this motion? Is there discussion on it?

Mr. Komarnicki.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Go ahead, Mr. Cannan.

I think Mr. Cannan was first.

**The Chair:** Okay, Mr. Cannan.

**Mr. Ron Cannan:** Thanks, Madam Chair. I wanted to clarify, maybe through the clerk or analyst, is this something that the Library of Parliament would look into? Is it something that they do as well?

**Ms. Chantal Collin (Committee Researcher):** The likelihood is that we could see whatever is in that performance report. We would call Treasury Board and make a formal request and we would wait for their answer, the same as is being done here.

**Mr. Ron Cannan:** I just wanted to clarify the process.

**Ms. Chantal Collin:** We could answer part of it in the documents that are made public, but obviously some information is not that readily available, so we would have to call Treasury Board.

**Mr. Ron Cannan:** Do you have any idea of the time it would take? It's pretty in-depth, isn't it?

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]...access to information—

**Ms. Chantal Collin:** It takes a long time.

**Mr. Ron Cannan:** That's what I'm wondering. What are we going to do with it after we get the information?

**An hon. member:** Or will it be ready in time?

**The Chair:** Well, let me just clarify something. The clerk reminded me that actually Mr. Martin did not officially move this motion, so right now we are discussing it, and I guess we have to decide, because it's the end of our meeting, if we want to continue with this discussion in a more formal process where we're actually speaking to the motion and making a decision on it. Is that the will of the committee?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Okay, then, Mr. Martin, would you please formally move this motion? Then we can continue with discussion.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** I'll move the motion as it reads on the piece of paper that everybody has in front of them.

**The Chair:** Does everyone have the motion in front of them?

**Mr. Tony Martin:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Okay. So moved.

Now we will go to Mr. Lobb, please.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Looking at the motion, I understand where Mr. Martin is trying to go here. Obviously, to have a very accurate opinion or assessment, we would need to peel back the federal layers, the provincial layers, and the municipal layers to really have a good understanding.

I know that he speaks specifically here about the Government of Canada, but obviously, with provincial transfers... We may have poverty solved before we get the final answer on where these costs are. If there are specific areas that Mr. Martin feels passionate about and wants to know about, as part of our final suggestions with a report, that might be more helpful as a specific piece of it, whether it's the guaranteed income supplement, or housing, or something specific and identifiable that the government staff might be able to get back to us on in a timely manner.

This looks like a lifetime project here, so I think we should take that under consideration.

● (1730)

**The Chair:** Mr. Komarnicki.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** I wonder if we shouldn't have this motion held in abeyance to get some understanding of the timelines and constraints involved in getting this kind of information. We committed to doing a report on what we have heard, and this may or may not be an impediment. It seems it may require a lot of work, but it may not. Somebody might know, but it certainly wouldn't be something that we as a committee would be aware of prior to voting on this motion.

In essence, I don't have any direct objection to the information, although it might be more difficult and time-consuming to get than we are anticipating, and I'm not so sure we would want it after our report. I think we're getting close to the place where we'll start considering the report fairly soon. Ought we not to have some basic information first in terms of what's involved in getting this information and how long it may take? I don't know... It's just a thought.

**The Chair:** Madam Folco.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** I don't want to speak to the text itself, Madam Chair. I want to speak to the importance of the idea.

Although there may be arguments about the text—and we will have a discussion on that—I think the idea is an extremely important one. Because we've said as a committee—and I would like to say that all members of this committee at some point or other have made this very clear—that poverty is expensive. Poverty is expensive to the government and, in fact, the government might be saving money by pulling people out of poverty. This is certainly how I interpret Tony Martin's motion.

So I would very strongly urge you to look to the passing of a motion that looks very much like this, because for once and for all we have to make it very clear to people that it's costing Canadians money when so many people are poor. And what we're trying to do is to show in black and white how much it is costing. That is how I interpret Mr. Martin's motion.

**The Chair:** Madam Minna.

**Hon. Maria Minna:** I agree with my colleague for those reasons. We can start wordsmithing the motion and never get it exactly right for everybody. What matters is the intent.

The other reason that I like the idea of including tax expenditures is that it's one thing we never look at. I remember dealing with this when I was on this committee, back in the nineties, believe it or not.

At that time, we asked Finance to produce all of the tax expenditures and they did, but there was very little evaluation as to whether they in fact impacted socially the way they were intended to or were meant to, and what the cost and the real impact were. For instance, certain credits affect only a small number, not what was intended, and what have you. And the cost to the treasury...because it's money that ultimately could be shifted in other ways as we look at a program.

To have this committee understand how the tax expenditures work is very important, I think. Just looking at that one piece, for me, makes this motion worthwhile.

**The Chair:** All right.

Is there any other debate on this motion?

Mr. Cannan.

**Mr. Ron Cannan:** I still don't understand. I mean, I understand what she is saying, but regarding the timeline, as my colleague Mr. Komarnicki said, could we maybe get an indication of how long it's going to take to get the information? We could take that first step and report back at our next meeting after getting an idea from Treasury Board.

**The Chair:** A timeline? All right. We could get the analyst to get the information.

Oh, I'm sorry. The clerk will get that.

**Mr. Ron Cannan:** Do a delegation from the analyst to the clerk...

**The Chair:** Mr. Lobb, you had something you wanted to say?

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

If the committee feels so passionately about Mr. Martin's motion, then I would suggest that the committee not take it half-heartedly and take half measures. They should go all the way, to the most finite of details: the number of emergency calls to a hospital, the number of hours OPP officers or RCMP spend taking calls, or—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

• (1735)

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** —for rural development, the amount the provinces fund the municipalities to help certain communities in financial distress.

That's what I understand Madam Folco and Madam Minna to be speaking about: the true cost of poverty. We have to peel back all the layers to find out what the true cost is. We're only taking half measures here as far as I'm concerned. We want to know what the true cost is. We might as well take the time here and really find out what it is, because half measures don't give anybody.... We have to know all the costs.

**The Chair:** We are going to get more information and come back to this motion to continue debate on it, so is it the will of the committee to adjourn debate at this time?

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** I had my hand up.

**The Chair:** I know. I want to ask first if we want to adjourn.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** I think we should adjourn debate until the next meeting or whenever we can get this information.

I also want to raise a point independent of it.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Martin, you moved it.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** I just want to say a couple of things.

**The Chair:** Sorry, but I first of all need to know if it's the will of the committee to adjourn this debate or to continue it.

**Some hon. members:** Adjourn.

**The Chair:** The government side says adjourn.

Do you want to continue debate or adjourn debate?

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Adjourn it, as long as the motion is still alive.

**The Chair:** It's still alive.

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Okay. That's fine.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Can we just hear from Mr. Martin?

**The Chair:** Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** There was some reference about the clerk going to Treasury Board to see how long it would take to get this information back. I don't want to wait forever either; otherwise it will be too late.

**The Chair:** She's very efficient—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** —and Mr. Etoke is even more efficient.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** I want to continue in the good spirit of consensus in which we've been working on this report going forward.

Anyway, I'm willing to wait for the information, put the motion again on the floor, and have people vote on it.

**The Chair:** That's good. I think we will probably have time, even on the 26th, for committee business.

Do you want to speak, Madam Beaudin or did you want to wait?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** No, everything is fine, we can adjourn. I will wait, hopefully, until the committee reconvenes.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We'll debate it further.

All right. You have one final point, Mr. Komarnicki?

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** I wanted to raise it at this time and I obviously couldn't. But at the next meeting, I would like to raise an issue with respect to the appearance of the minister, the asking of questions, and the provision of answers, particularly with respect to Mr. Lessard's seven minutes. Of course he's not here today, so I haven't raised it specifically, but I will want to at the next meeting when he returns.

**The Chair:** I anticipate that we'll have time for committee business a week from today, so we can address some of these issues then. If we do have time on Wednesday, we'll do it.

We are adjourned for now.









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