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

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**Chair**

Ms. Candice Hoepfner



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

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• (0845)

[English]

**The Chair (Ms. Candice Hooppner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC)):** Good morning, everyone.

I would like to call to order meeting number 38 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Committee members, we have some business at the end of the meeting today, so instead of giving a full hour for the first set of witnesses and then cut off the second one, I'll probably do about 50 minutes in the first hour, 50 minutes in the second, and then we can do our committee business.

We're very pleased today to have with us Cindy Blackstock, who is from the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada. Ms. Blackstock is the executive director.

We're also very happy to have Conrad Saulis. Conrad is the policy director of the National Association of Friendship Centres.

We are really grateful that you are here today. As you know, we are doing a study on the federal supports that are available, and should be available, to adoptive parents. We know aboriginal children and the adoptive process is a very important part of this puzzle, so we're pleased that you're here.

We ask that you each make a presentation of about five to seven minutes. Then we can have some time for questions.

Ms. Blackstock.

**Ms. Cindy Blackstock (Executive Director, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning, committee members.

Today is an opportunity for you to make a difference in the lives of thousands of first nations children.

So often Canadians get so overwhelmed by the disadvantage experienced by first nations, Métis, and Inuit children, and the long-standing nature of those disadvantages, that some wonder if there's anything that can be done. I assure you that there is. It is culturally based equity for all children in the country. It is as simple as that.

One of the first pieces to understand is the reason why adoption, as Madam Chair pointed out, is such a key matter for first nations children. It is because they are overrepresented in the child welfare

system, removed from their families at about a rate of six to eight times that of non-aboriginal children, the Auditor General of Canada says in her 2008 report, and the reasons they're removed are not related to abuse; they're related to neglect, linked to poverty, poor housing, and caregiver substance misuse.

Now the good news about that is that those are all things we can do something about. The bad news is that first nations children on reserves, as the Auditor General confirmed in 2008 and repeated expert reports have found going back a decade, receive inequitable child and family services to keep them safely in their family homes.

Many of the members at this table know that Canada is currently subject to a trial before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal on allegations it is discriminating racially against first nations children and child welfare. We want to have that case heard on the merit, so that kids, in the first instance, get an equal shot at being home. Canada is trying to get out of that hearing on a legal loophole. We think this is such a fundamental issue of importance; the equity of first nations children in 2010 should never be resolved on legal technicalities. It is a matter of Canadian conscience, morality, and our commitment from the apology of the Prime Minister, and recently by the government signing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

If we were to do something about why there are so many first nations children in child welfare care, we would then be able to address the issue of adoption much more effectively and in a sensitive way.

There are several forms of adoption. There is western adoption, which really creates a bond between a child and a parent. That type of adoption was imposed on first nations communities. Many of you will know that during a period called the “sixties scoop”, there were mass removals of first nations children, and they were adopted into non-aboriginal homes, often permanently, in Canada and in the United States, a process that was so rampant that it commended Judge Edwin Kimelman to conduct a review of the matter in 1983, in his report “No Quiet Place”. He found that the whole practice amounted to cultural genocide. That resulted in many first nations wanting to set a moratorium on adoption, understandably so, as many of their children were leaving the homes, often because they were denied the same basic access to service that other Canadians enjoy.

Over the last 20 years, first nations have reasserted their ability, their traditional laws for adoption. First nations communities all across the country, for thousands of years, have practised adoption. It just simply wasn't called that. There isn't a word that really is proximal to adoption, because in a first nations concept, it is a child being adopted by a community. It is introducing to the child multiple caregivers and creating a safety net so that if any one individual caregiver is no longer able to care for the child, there are adults in the circle who understand their responsibilities and their love and relationship to that child and they step in.

In the brief that I prepared for you, I highlighted the Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency in Alberta. Sadly, the federal government provides no systematic funding for first nations adoption programs, or for support for first nations parents pursuing adoption or having placed their children for adoption. But this particular community received some pilot funding from the Government of Alberta. Its program is very holistic. It provides supports for not only the birth parent and birth adoptive parent but for their extended families and nations as well. It does that pre-, during, and post-adoption. It's all based on the Yellowhead Tribal Services' customary concepts of what adoption and what relationships with children mean.

What's so extraordinary about this program is they have placed well over 100 children, many of whom are not babies, but children with special needs—your eight-year-old with fetal alcohol syndrome—or teenagers. They have not had one adoption break down. This is unparalleled in the vast majority of mainstream adoption agencies. For that, this agency has won several international awards of excellence. It has been generous in sharing its model with other first nations, such as the Cowichan Tribes in British Columbia, who are mentored by YTSA and who are currently, with great success, able to recreate that model in their own cultural base.

• (0850)

I would commend that one of the things that needs to happen is for the federal government to support these best practices, because we know they work for first nations children and their families and for adoptive parents.

The other piece that needs to happen is in international adoption. Although there's growing recognition of the importance of identifying aboriginal children's heritage and supporting that in any adoption placement, whether that happens via mainstream or first nations adoption, there is absolutely no mechanism to be able to

determine whether children coming from international countries and being placed for adoption here have any recognition of their indigenous heritage.

Now think about this for a moment, committee members. The largest population of indigenous peoples in the world is in China. Many children from that country are placed here. The second largest country in the world with the most indigenous peoples is India, and yet those children are not identified as indigenous and no supports are provided.

I'm just going to refer you to the final page of my brief, page 6, where I list a bunch of recommendations.

The first is to provide equitable and culturally based supports for children in their own family homes. Children should not be placed for adoption because their families are deprived of the same shot at being able to care for them successfully in their family homes.

The other is that the federal government must work in meaningful partnership with first nations, on reserve and off reserve, to provide holistic supports, along the lines of those provided by Yellowhead Tribal Services, for adoptive parents, children, and communities, and their birth families as well. The federal government must also work with organizations such as the National Association of Friendship Centres to ensure that those services are provided off reserve, because currently the number of aboriginal programs off reserve is very spotty.

The final recommendation is with regard to Jordan's Principle. This was passed by Parliament in 2007 as a private member's motion. It ensures that first nations children and their families are not deprived of services available to other Canadians because of fiscal jurisdictional disputes between the federal and provincial governments. The federal government, since passing it, has chosen to narrow it to apply to only children with complex medical needs. That is not in the original wording of the motion; it is not in Jordan's Principle. It applies to all government services. Should it be implemented, that would make sure that every first nations family has the same availability to adoption supports that other Canadians enjoy.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (0855)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Blackstock.

We will now go to Mr. Saulis. You have seven minutes. I'll let you know when you're at the one-minute mark. Thank you.

**Mr. Conrad Saulis (Policy Director, National Association of Friendship Centres):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank you and the members of the committee for the invitation to come to present to you on this—as Cindy very eloquently said—very important and serious matter and issue.

As I prepare presentations to make before various committees that the NAFC presents to, I always do my own little bit of research. It was in this particular case that I just couldn't come up with any good news or good scenarios, or anything positive, necessarily. It was more disappointing things that I came across, in trying to find information on urban aboriginal adoption issues and matters. I wish there were positive things. But on the other hand, as Cindy very eloquently said, I think there's an opportunity. There are opportunities all the time.

The opportunities are based on our own willingness to dialogue together, to listen to each other, to learn and find out from each other, to learn from experts like Cindy what the best practices are out there. There are best practices on reserve, and despite their limited number, urban-based child and family service agencies and Métis child and family service agencies have best practices as well.

One of the toughest bridges to cross that I learned about in my research was—and in particular I'll look towards Ontario—the capacity to appreciate what customary adoption is and its uniqueness from aboriginal community to aboriginal community. It seemed that there was a desire on the part of the established Children's Aid Society system to want to compartmentalize it and use a compartmentalizing process and take it from one community to another community.

We always pride ourselves on the distinctiveness of communities. While we may be one nation—maybe it's the Ojibway Nation or the Oneida Nation—communities within those nations are distinct. The same thing exists in the urban areas, although it's more of a blending. As well, there are particular issues that pertain to each case.

As I said, it was one of the more sorrowful kinds of research issues that I've looked into.

I am a former social worker from my own first nation community of Tobique in New Brunswick. I was the director-supervisor of the child welfare agency back there as well, back in the early eighties, so I have a good idea. I was a few years ago able to moderate a round table discussion here in Ottawa with some adoptive parents who had adopted aboriginal children. They very eloquently, very sadly, and in many situations breaking down in tears were saying how frustrated they were with the system.

Unfortunately, what I'm saying is not in my presentation. On the other hand, I think it's important to let you know of the experiences that adoptive parents have with the federal government, and in particular with the Department of Indian Affairs—and to a certain extent as well, I guess, with the first nations and Inuit health branch—under non-insured health benefits to access those benefits and be able to provide properly and adequately for the child, if it's a status first nations child.

In the urban area, we have such a blending of aboriginal people. We have a lot of first nations people, a lot of Métis people, and in particular in the east, in Montreal and in Ottawa, a lot of Inuit as well.

• (0900)

It puts a lot of pressure on the very few child welfare agencies that exist. There's one in Toronto, Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, and in Vancouver as well, the Aboriginal Child and Family

Services Society. I know for sure that the one in Toronto does work on adoptions.

There are a number of issues. I want to read a little bit from an article I ran across in my research. It's called "Adoption Crisis". It says:

In April 2007, the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights issued a report titled *Children: The Silenced Citizens* that concluded "there is an adoption crisis in Canada." It called on "governments across Canada to recognize and address the adoption crisis in this country, particularly in the case of aboriginal children." Despite the fact that aboriginal families are more inclined than non-aboriginal to adopt, there continues to be a chronic shortage of aboriginal foster and adoptive parents.

Meanwhile, a May 2008 report by the Auditor General of Canada found the federal government is failing to provide First Nations Child and Family Services agencies with adequate funding to meet the number or the needs of children in care.

And here is the champion right here:

That report stated that the funding formula has not been reviewed since 1998, and it has not been adjusted for inflation since 1995.

Earlier this year, the Canadian Human Rights Commission launched an inquiry into a complaint regarding First Nations children in state care.

In Ontario, there are currently approximately 9,200 children available for adoption. Of those, 1,191 (13%) are children with aboriginal ancestry.

I think I'll stop there.

**The Chair:** Thank you. That actually is perfect timing. Thank you for both those presentations.

I think we'll start with a five-minute round, and then we'll see whether we can do three minutes after that. The five minutes will include the questions and the answers. Again, I'll be keeping the time, so if you just watch me, I'll let you know how much time you have to answer the question.

We'll begin with the Liberals, with Madam Folco, please.

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

Madam Blackstock, Mr. Saulis, let me tell you how much I appreciated your presentations, for all sorts of reasons. One of the reasons is that you didn't come and say, "These are the problems." You came and said, "These are the solutions." I think the time for looking at the problems, if I can put it this way, is really over. We know what the problems are; it's up to us as legislators, on both sides of the table, to look at how we're going to follow through with some of the suggestions and recommendations you have made in this matter.

I'm entirely in agreement with you when you talk about cultural suicide. I've worked with various first nations groups, particularly in Quebec, and I know what happens to them when kids are taken out of their own home environment into a totally different culture and language. So I'm very happy that you spoke up loud and clear.

What I'd like to know first of all is how traditional adoption, within the particular aboriginal group that the child belongs to in the first place, happens. Does the federal or the provincial government have a role to play? That's my first question, and then I'll move on.

I'll leave it up to whoever wants to answer.

• (0905)

**Ms. Cindy Blackstock:** Thank you.

The federal government has a responsibility to adequately fund and support first-nations-developed customary adoption programs. At this point, they're not doing it in any kind of systematic fashion, nor are they developing any strategy in partnership with first nations around supports for adoptive parents or for birth parents on reserve. This is critical, because as you pointed out, Madam, we've already recognized for decades the importance of first nations children being placed with their communities whenever possible. So why aren't we doing everything to create conditions in which that happens, by supporting these parents?

As for the provinces, in several of the provinces and in the territories there are currently provisions for the recognition of customary adoptions. The provisions vary, but in general it requires that an elder be able to say "this was our traditional form of adoption" before the provincial court; that can be recognized. Many of the provinces and territories are moving forward—provinces, for example, such as British Columbia—and have had these provisions for a number of years, but they haven't been operationalized because of the lack of federal funding and support for adoption programs.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** It's less difficult to understand this when you're talking about a rural milieu on the reservations. What happens in the urban milieu, where the community may not necessarily be a homogenous community within the city or a town? How does it work? I put that question to both of you.

**Mr. Conrad Saulis:** In the urban areas there are obviously a lot more challenges because of the composition of the urban aboriginal population. But I think there is still the same value of wanting to be able to assure that native children are in the care of native parents, whether they are foster parents or adoptive parents.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Does it matter which native group they belong to in that case?

**Mr. Conrad Saulis:** There would be a preference to find either adoptive or foster parents who are from the same nation. If it's a Métis child, find Métis. If it's a first nation child, find first nation parents. If all goes well, if it's an Ojibway child, find Ojibway parents. But if not, find somebody who is at least first nation who then would be able to support that child.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** In the urban environment, who is the agency? Is there an agency apart from your own agency in terms of a government agency? Is it the provincial or the federal agency that works with you in the urban environment?

**Mr. Conrad Saulis:** There are provincial and territorial agencies that work with the Native Child and Family Service Agency of Toronto. They would work with the Children's Aid Society and with the provincial government, and it is the same in Vancouver. They would fall within the purview of provincial legislation and authority.

**The Chair:** Monsieur Lessard.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Thank you, Ms. Blackstock and Mr. Saulis, for being here today to assist us with our study that deals, as you know, with federal support measures for adoptive parents. As you may already see me coming, I will try to bring the discussion back to the subject of our study. I believe you also deal with it, Ms. Blackstock in the brief you submitted.

Your report includes a statement that echoes what you raised earlier:

There is an acknowledgment that the birth parent has a special and unique gift to contribute to the child that cannot be provided by other community members, so active steps are taken to ensure the child knows his or her parents, extended family and clan.

You emphasize repeatedly this sense of belonging that must accompany the child until adulthood, in terms of his or her place of origin and especially his birth parents.

My first question is directed at both of you. Regarding this concern you have about providing support to a family in order for the child to be able to stay in that home, what are those concrete measures that could be taken within the federal jurisdiction, as far as you know?

You say in your report and our analysts have also reminded us of this: since 1951, powers have been delegated to provinces, especially in the areas of health, welfare, education, but also partly in the area of adoption. I would like to hear your views on this.

What are the very specific services on which we should focus that would be part of the federal government's responsibilities?

● (0910)

[English]

**Ms. Cindy Blackstock:** Thank you very much, Monsieur Lessard, for your question.

In my view, it's very simple. The federal government on reserve has a responsibility to adequately and flexibly fund children and family services, be they for adoption or child welfare, to an equitable and culturally based level. That is not my standard; that is the standard of the Department of Indian Affairs.

According to the Auditor General in 2008, they failed to meet that standard. Although they've launched something called an enhanced funding model, their own evaluation, dated 2010 and done by the Indian affairs department, echoes the finding of the Auditor General, which said this is not equitable.

The good news is there is a solution to it. Back in 2005 there was an expert report prepared by over 20 leading academics across the country, including five economists, that costed out the shortfall in child and family services on reserve. At the time, it would have cost less than half a percent of the federal surplus budget to make sure these children had an equitable chance of staying safely in their homes. The federal government chose not to implement that, and has not implemented that solution up to this day.

So we would ask the federal government to take immediate action to ensure the culturally based equity of all children and their families in adoption and child welfare care on reserve.

**Mr. Conrad Saulis:** Thank you for the question.

In the off-reserve or the urban setting, with the division of powers between the federal and provincial governments, there is a complexity to how the federal government can and should work with provincial authorities to address the issues and the needs of the urban aboriginal population. But I believe there is a role for the federal government to play. I think there are federal responsibilities for aboriginal people regardless of residency.

One of the issues that first nations continually bring up is the portability of their rights. They don't exist only on first nations reserves or communities, and they continue to exist no matter where first nations people live. The Métis have always struggled to ensure that the federal government continue to enhance and support the federal jurisdictional responsibility. I believe there is a role for the federal government with the provincial and territorial authorities.

**The Chair:** Thank you. That's great.

We'll go to Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP):** Thank you for coming today and sharing with us your thoughts and recommendations.

Cindy, I've heard you tell us a couple of times that there are currently more aboriginal children in care in non-aboriginal homes than there ever were in residential schools. You also said that the reason for this in many instances has to do with neglect, and underpinning that is the question of poverty. Maybe you could expand a bit more on that for us. Is there anything more sinister going on here than simply the country trying to look after some very poor children?

• (0915)

**Ms. Cindy Blackstock:** Thank you, Member, for your question.

It's important to think about what neglect is. Too often as Canadians we think neglect is a parent not doing his or her job properly. But when you look at the poverty and the poor housing, particularly for first nations, you see that those are things beyond the ability of people on reserve to control, because the people do not own their own residences. Their economic development is restricted by the Indian Act. So what we have created, along with the inequitable services on reserve, is what I often term a "perfect storm of disadvantage". If you put any child in those conditions, their parents would struggle to take proper care of them.

The good news is that the federal government has control over housing on reserve. It has control over the Indian Act. It could promote economic development. It could ensure equity in children's services. If we did that, Member, I totally believe that we could finally turn the page on the disadvantage of first nations children. We would have substantial grounds from which to make other opportunities available. Some people might ask, well, Cindy, will that solve all the problems? Well, clearly not. But it would provide the best opportunity for success.

There's a reason why inequity is not a determinant of help. We as Canadians and you particularly as leaders in the federal government have an opportunity to make sure this is the generation that grows up knowing what it is to be treated with equity, support, and respect by the Government of Canada.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** When you talked about the Yellowhead Tribal Services in Alberta, you said that there were over 100 children and that none of these situations has failed. Were they able to deal with all the children that needed care in that community, or were there others who for lack of resources or capacity had to be sent elsewhere? Did they take care of the whole challenge themselves?

**Ms. Cindy Blackstock:** This program is a pilot funded by the Alberta government. Sadly, there have been times when I've gone to this amazing program and they've literally wondered if they would have to close the doors the next day, if this would be the last adoption ceremony for these children. It's really unnecessary. There is a lot of need, and because it's been so successful, you can imagine that community members are seeing this as an important support for their community, their children, and their families.

The worry at this agency is that the province's priorities might change, and in the absence of a federal plan, these children would go back to being adoptive into the mainstream environment, which has not done a very good job of reaching out to first nations, Métis, or Inuit communities in their adoption programs and in developing the types of supports and the success we're seeing at Yellowhead Tribal Services.

**The Chair:** You have about one minute.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** Conrad, you mentioned there's no way of keeping track of what's happening in the mainstream communities for aboriginal children. We heard earlier testimony that even in the larger adoption field there's no registry of children for adoption or families waiting. There's no way of connecting this. Maybe you could talk a little bit further about the comment you made that within the aboriginal community it's even worse.

**The Chair:** You have about 30 seconds, sir.

**Mr. Conrad Saulis:** Okay. Sadly, and unfortunately, Mr. Martin, that reality is true for much of the information about the urban aboriginal population. A lot of the health statistics, life conditions, and social determinants of health numbers are based on studies of first nations on reserve, and the urban aboriginal health and social issues are not as well known and documented.

I think there's a lot of opportunity to be able to do that work, to do that work with Cindy's organization and our organization and with other organizations. We would certainly be able to help. But right now, as she says in her presentation, there is a huge dearth of information for the urban population.

• (0920)

**The Chair:** Mr. Vellacott.

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC):** Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

I was very much looking forward to this presentation today. Cindy, in particular, your reputation has preceded you as being very knowledgeable, and various people have recommended that you would be a wealth of resources for this committee.

I want to start my remarks quickly, because I want to get my head around this, and get some perspective. I always struggle with the poverty thing, placing that as the blame for difficulties and so on. I came from a low-income family, a poverty family, you might say. If we had known about the low-income cut-off as a family, it would have been so high up there it would have been totally unattainable. We didn't even know about it, mind you.

I was the oldest of five boys and one girl. There were periods of time when my dad was not employed. If my mom and dad happen to read Hansard, they might hear some of this today. I suppose that by today's standards, even our house, compared to aboriginal homes and so on, might have been at the lower end, or possibly even condemned. I know it was torn down later. But it was warm in the winter. We had food, lots of garden stuff, and so on.

The upshot is that poverty did not drive our family apart. We had very few wants provided and supplied to us; most of our needs were met, although we weren't always even sure about that.

I say that to simply drive home the point that I don't believe that poverty in and of itself is the determining factor in terms of driving families apart. It certainly wasn't in our case; in fact, it drew us together. Faith was an important part of it and education was stressed. There were those kinds of supports.

Anyhow, with that as a background—

**The Chair:** Madam Minna, when you have the floor—

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**The Chair:** No, I'm sorry, you were talking. I've asked you time and time again to please respect whoever has the floor.

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Sometimes I ask a question for clarification.

**The Chair:** I respect that, but I just ask that you respect when somebody has the floor.

Thank you.

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** I sincerely and honestly want to get at this issue and try to pull it apart. Yes, not having enough of an income and so on is sometimes a factor, but there are some other issues as well, obviously.

As was true in that era, I know that today a lot of families don't know anything about or access child and family services. So I need to understand, Cindy, a little more when you talk about child and family services. I really sincerely want to know what is meant by that. Most Canadians don't access it, don't know much about it. It may even be a fearful thing if child and family services has to step in. So tell me what you mean.

Then help me on the list of “services”. I'm assuming they might be things like education, health, and so on. My reserves have schools, and we have differences in terms of quality, possibly, although some would dispute that. But anyway, help me on this whole issue of services, and the poverty issue in particular.

**Ms. Cindy Blackstock:** Thank you very much, Member.

The issue of poverty has been well documented in child welfare research as a leading driver of all children into child welfare. It is one of the best predictors. Although there are families such as yours that

were successful, good public policy is not when success is the exception. Good public policy is when success is the rule. When you have a cultural group, first nations people, that is consistently overrepresented not only in child welfare but also in the factors that we know from research drive children into care, like poverty, then we need to create conditions for their success.

One of the important pieces is giving them at least an equitable opportunity to succeed, as people with higher incomes, who are typically the non-aboriginal Canadians. There is no evidence that I know of where if you take a population that's disadvantaged and provide them inequitable services, you actually get better outcomes for children.

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** Just to the point on that, Cindy, do you mean specifically that they're not getting the educational levels, the health levels?

**Ms. Cindy Blackstock:** Thank you for that question.

We know from the Auditor General that there are shortfalls in education and we know from the research on Jordan's Principle that there are problems with health.

What I am here to talk about specifically is that we have to pay attention to all of those things, including child welfare services. A child welfare service could be that when you intervene in a family, your primary obligation is to ensure the safety and well-being of that child in their family home.

So the types of services that could be provided are things like family counselling, individual counselling for the child, supports for children with special needs, crisis intervention counselling, sometimes homemaker supports and services, and sometimes child care. It will depend on the specific needs of the child. I am saying, look at the full roster of services and make sure they're equitable.

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** Right.

To follow through on that question.... And I did want to note that I have a dear adopted aboriginal nephew and niece. They've had their struggles—fetal alcohol syndrome struggles—and so on. I think the parents would have gladly reconnected them with their culture if there had been a way to do that. This was after the so-called “sixties scoop”. They have reconnected now, but they're in their late twenties, early thirties. They're struggling, though, and they've had their difficulties over the years.

● (0925)

**The Chair:** Mr. Vellacott, if could you please....

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** My question is, in Saskatchewan particularly, where 85%.... We know there's a big issue there and a big concern, as you well know. So if there are ways...and I gather it's difficult—

**The Chair:** Mr. Vellacott, your time actually is up, so quickly ask your question, and then I'd like hear....

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** Okay.

The communities in Saskatchewan find it difficult to receive their own first nations back in. Is that again the issue of underfunding of services? They're not being received back into those homes, at least at any great rate.



**Ms. Cindy Blackstock:** You know, there are only two repatriation programs across the country, despite the harms of the “sixties scoop” and now the multi-generational effects of child welfare. There is no funding provided by the federal government to support first nations, Métis, or Inuit communities in being able to bring back community members who were placed outside of their communities. That's definitely an area for the attention of your committee, and it would be welcomed, I'm sure, by many first nations people who were adopted out, and for their families and communities.

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

We're going to do a very quick three-minute round, so that will basically be time for one quick question and a quick answer from each side.

We'll start with Mr. Savage for three minutes, please.

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

It's good to see both of you again. And like all members of the committee, I commend you both on the great work you do on behalf of all Canadians, frankly.

Ms. Blackstock, I've heard you talk a lot, and very passionately and eloquently, about Jordan's Principle and its potential impact. It has been adopted by the House of Commons, but it hasn't been enacted in many ways and followed up on.

I want to find out exactly how the child first policy would be followed in the case of adoption. Can you just talk a little bit more about that?

**Ms. Cindy Blackstock:** Thank you, Member, for your question.

You may know that in many of the provinces and territories they've taken the step of providing what they call post-adoption supports for parents. Those are provided because some of the children who are most in need of permanent homes and families have significant special needs, such as the other member pointed out, with fetal alcohol syndrome. But without specialized services, some families don't have the financial means to adopt.

They didn't want finances to be a barrier for the adoption of the neediest children, so they developed a whole series of services that are available for parents off reserve to support the care of children post-adoption. Those are often not available on reserve because of the lack of implementation of Jordan's Principle. The provinces view the funding of those types of supports as a federal responsibility, and the federal government passes the buck over to the provinces. Sadly, it's the children and their families who consistently lose out.

I think it would be a wonderful thing if we saw the full implementation of Jordan's Principle. After all, it's simply ensuring that race isn't a factor in the distribution of government services. It's something that could be done, and it would make a big difference.

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

**The Chair:** You still have another minute.

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

You spoke about the cultural and linguistic rights that are respected in terms of international adoption. You mentioned China's indigenous population, and India.

Can you talk a little bit about what Canada should be doing in that way, and what you think maybe is missing?

**Ms. Cindy Blackstock:** Well, the federal government, of course, through immigration policy and other factors, has a key role in international adoption. I'd like to see the federal government make it mandatory that if a child from an international country is indigenous, his or her indigenous group is documented and there are requirements on behalf of the adoptive parent to nurture and support that child's understanding of his or her indigenous identity, and, whenever possible, to nurture those connections going forward. At this point, those children are simply considered to be Chinese—versus indigenous, for example.

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

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

Mr. Komarnicki, you have three minutes.

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

A number of witnesses have testified that for adoptive parents and children, there's grief, trauma, and loss of culture and identity. I was struck by the fact that some children were adopted from the hospital, so to speak, some at a later age, some within the country, and some internationally. It seems that more supports were required for some than for others, just because of the nature of the circumstances.

They also mentioned that there were children waiting to be adopted and parents who wanted to adopt, but the two groups never met. I was struck by the fact that we don't have a way of connecting the many people. I understand there are 30,000 children who could be adopted but aren't, and people who are going internationally to adopt—so that's not happening.

You said that aboriginal children were overrepresented. Do we have a system of tracking the aboriginal foster and adoptive parents who are available to adopt, with respect to first nations custom adoptions, if you want to call them that? Do we have some means of identifying who they are so we can match the two, as a start? They obviously need supports if you can't, but down to the basics, do we have that kind of information available from province to province?

• (0930)

**Ms. Cindy Blackstock:** The short answer is no. There are individual communities that do a good job of tracking that.

I think it's really important to highlight Yellowhead Tribal Services again. When the mainstream were doing adoptions they said there weren't any first nations parents available. But when Yellowhead Tribal Services took over and provided the type of nurturing, support, and home studies that didn't compromise quality, they found there were a lot of family community members who were willing to step forward. That's why there have been so many successful adoptions.

So it's not only tracking; it's nurturing conditions that welcome people, where they see a role for themselves in supporting children in an adoption place, especially given the stigma, quite frankly, of the "sixties scoop". So we need to provide an alternative that people feel good about.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** I appreciate that.

Back to the tracking, how can you possibly get the right answers about who's out there? Secondly—and I put it to both of you—if you had that, what's the proportion of children available for adoption compared to the available parents or custom-type adoption situations?

**Ms. Cindy Blackstock:** If we provide proper supports, we can ensure that just about every child is placed within an aboriginal home. If we don't provide proper supports, I don't know what those proportions would be.

How do we track it? We create a national database on first nations children's issues. I can't even tell you exactly how many first nations children are in child welfare care in this country. We could easily create a national database that tracks children and families who are available, as you're suggesting, and make sure that we're maximizing opportunities to be able to provide these kids with good quality care. Canada has not done that up to this point. There are examples of it in the United States that show how it can be done through different database systems.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. You're certainly confirming what we're hearing across the board—that for aboriginals and non-aboriginals there really is no nationwide information available.

We'll go to Madame Beaudin for three minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you for being here today, all of you.

It is a real pleasure to hear from you and to see how well you know the issues.

First of all, I have a question to improve my understanding of the subject.

You talked, among other things, about the factors that lead to the need for first nations children to be adopted. For example, it can be poor housing, alcohol abuse and neglect.

Am I right in thinking that if we take action to remedy these factors, we will reduce the number of first nations children in need of adoption?

[*English*]

**Ms. Cindy Blackstock:** All the research suggests that would be the case. We wouldn't see a turnaround in the shorter term, but over the longer term we would expect to see, in a healthy and functioning child welfare system, the number of aboriginal children in care reflect the percentage of children in the population.

For example, in Alberta, 9% of the children are aboriginal, so we should see 9% of the child welfare population being aboriginal. At this point, as we sit here, 64% of the children in foster care are

aboriginal in that province, and that's echoed in other regions of the country.

All the research—the best evidence—suggests that if we deal with those factors, we'll be able to provide optimal conditions for children's safety.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** I believe it is best to intervene while the children are at the youngest possible age. You do not need to convince me that this is a community where children can flourish. It helps when everybody in the community feels a responsibility towards its children.

However, I also understand that you have developed a best practice, a program that has proven its worth. I imagine this program, in partnership with friendship centres and with all winning conditions met, could assist in helping those children. This program has been subsidized and constitutes a best practice. If it were implemented more widely, this would help a way to help first nations children.

• (0935)

[*English*]

**Ms. Cindy Blackstock:** Yes, I absolutely think it can be. It's not just Yellowhead Tribal Services. Mi'kmaq Family and Children's Services in Nova Scotia has another exemplary program. We're seeing that when first nations have control over their adoption services, the outcomes for children are better. That is echoed in a lot of the research coming out of Harvard University, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Victoria. Give communities an opportunity and they will take care of their kids.

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

Dr. Wong, you have questions.

**Mrs. Alice Wong (Richmond, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you very much for coming.

I'm interested especially in the international adoption process. As we all understand, it has something to do with immigration as well. It's not as simple as the Canadian one.

Are you suggesting the linguistic and cultural heritage of the aboriginal children be kept in the family, that these children should be adopted by Chinese of aboriginal heritage, or are you saying that...? I just want you to clarify that point as to how that could be made possible.

**Ms. Cindy Blackstock:** I think it's important for the child to know who he or she is. This is their heritage. It's where they come from. In any cultural group, as you know, Madam Member, there is great diversity, and that's the richness of the people of that country. If this child is an indigenous child from anywhere else in the world, they have a right to know that. When it comes to placement, at least that can be considered a factor in the adoptive home. The adoptive families then have more information to be able to ensure the cultural heritage of that child.

What we know from experts such as Dr. Jeannine Carrière is that a key to success for adoption in Canada is that these children know where they came from and have opportunities to connect. These are aboriginal people adopted either to non-aboriginal or aboriginal homes. In an international environment, that may be a bit more challenging, but it is still their right to know who they are.

**Mrs. Alice Wong:** Are you suggesting that parents who would like to adopt these children be required by law or be encouraged to do it? I want to know your opinion on that.

**Ms. Cindy Blackstock:** The international law standards in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples say children have a right to their indigenous culture. I think it's the obligation of adoptive parents as well as countries to ensure children know who they are, and through that knowledge, they are provided with an opportunity to reach out to members of their group and understand who they are on a better level.

**Mrs. Alice Wong:** You're not suggesting that aboriginal children should be adopted by an aboriginal parent, that aboriginal children adopted from overseas be adopted only by people with an aboriginal background?

**Ms. Cindy Blackstock:** I'm not saying that's exclusive, but I'm thinking isn't it a better idea if you know as much about the child as possible in order to find the best adoptive family? If you know the child is indigenous, and you have two families—one who's indigenous from that cultural group here, or roughly the same cultural group as the child, and one who's not—doesn't it make sense to at least consider that as a factor? I'm not saying exclude other families for placement, but I'm saying more information is always better for the child and for the adoptive parent, and certainly for the birth parents as well.

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

Madam Minna, you had a question.

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Yes, very quickly, to Ms. Blackstock.

I was particularly interested earlier when you talked about the organization in Manitoba, Yellowhead. I was particularly interested when you mentioned all ages. One of the things we've discussed here...we had a presentation that older children are hard to place, and there's a very large number in the country. After a certain age, they call it "age out" and they don't.... But you said of all age groups that this was a success.

Could you explain to me how that works out for older children? That's one of the areas we've been discussing, and it seems to have been a problem elsewhere.

**Ms. Cindy Blackstock:** The real key for them is that they provide that holistic support. It's really about a child being adopted by a whole community.

I went to one of the adoption ceremonies, Madam Member. There were approximately six children there. Only one was a baby. The rest were between the ages of about six and 16, and some of them had special needs.

The birth family, the extended birth family, the child, the adoptive family, and the extended adoptive family all had supportive services

before the adoption. So it's as if everybody is umbrellaed and supported in this whole process.

The adoption ceremony itself happens in front of all community members. This isn't a secret. It's a celebration. The child is honoured for making it possible for the adults to have a growing, extended family. It's kind of like two families marrying each other. And the child is honoured for making that possible. The child is bringing greater supports to the adults in the community. That's the wonderful thing about this model. And I think that's why it's been so successful.

● (0940)

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

**The Chair:** Thank you.

That's a very nice picture you painted. We've heard some testimony from some young children, actually, about sometimes almost being bullied or shamed because of adoption. So it's really nice to hear about honouring the children and honouring the process. Thank you for that.

I want to thank you both again for being here.

I'm going to suspend for about three minutes so that we can bring in our next witnesses. Thanks again.

●

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

●

**The Chair:** We would like to resume our meeting. We have only 45 minutes, because the committee does have business. I would ask the witnesses and the committee members to please take their places, and we will begin.

We're pleased to have some witnesses with us today who are going to share some of their personal experiences in adopting aboriginal children. We have with us again Laura Eggertson. Ms. Eggertson was here before. She's here today in her role with the Adoption Council of Canada but also to share with us her personal experience adopting children.

We're very glad to have you.

We also have Joy and Dan Loney and Jennifer Lewis.

Again, witnesses, please keep an eye on me for time. We really are tight on time. I hate to cut you off, but we all abide by certain rules. I'd like you to keep to between five and seven minutes. I'll let you know when you have about two minutes left. Then you'll know that you really need to wrap it up.

Laura, would you please begin with your story? Thank you.

● (0945)

**Ms. Laura Eggertson (Board Member, Adoption Council of Canada):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for inviting me back.

I'm going to speak to my experience of adopting as a non-aboriginal or mainstream parent of two aboriginal children.

First of all, I want to say that I'm a proud mother of two young Ojibway women. I adopted my first daughter, Miranda, when she was eight years old. At the time she was in non-aboriginal foster care in Kenora. I saw her picture on Canada's Waiting Children, which is the national photo listing service that the Adoption Council of Canada runs. She was the first person adopted as a result of that list, although I didn't know it at the time.

I'm adopted myself, so I always envisioned adoption as a way to build a family. As a reporter, I had covered many aboriginal issues and had been in many first nations communities, where I had very positive experiences. I was committed to adopting an aboriginal child and to fostering that child's culture and heritage. My children know who they are and I'm proud of that.

My home was already filled with aboriginal art and books, and I made contacts with the aboriginal communities wherever possible where I was living. Here in Ottawa I've had great support from the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health. When I adopted I was told by Miranda's social worker in Kenora that her band had been informed that she was a crown ward eligible for adoption. Her community had an opportunity to make a plan for her and they were not able to do so. Today, as a non-aboriginal parent, I would probably not be permitted to adopt Miranda.

The political climate concerning the adoption of aboriginal children by non-aboriginal parents is a difficult one. You heard a little bit about that today. I want to tell you that sitting here it made me pretty uncomfortable. There's a bit of a subtext going on here, which is that as a non-aboriginal parent I'm an inferior parent to my aboriginal children. I have to say that makes me uncomfortable because I don't think it's true. It's not ideal, but I don't think we should be establishing families on the basis of race as a barrier, any more than we should be establishing on a racial basis.

I should also note that I took Miranda back to her home community when she was 16, and she has since reconnected with her birth family. I hope that if you have a youth panel, she'll be able to speak to you about that. I think she needed to make that reconnection, although it was not an easy experience for anybody.

Five years after I adopted Miranda, I adopted my second daughter, who was a member of the Aamjiwnaang First Nation, also known as the Chippewas of Sarnia. The process for that adoption was quite different, and I met with representatives from her band at that time. Although they didn't want to commit themselves in writing to approving the adoption in a non-aboriginal family, they did not oppose the adoption. In practice, they signed off on it without putting that in writing.

The Adoption Council of Canada's position is that, first of all, the federal government should, as Cindy Blackstock said, fund native child welfare agencies at least as well as provincial child welfare agencies so that they can support families and hopefully prevent aboriginal children—as we would like to prevent any child—from coming into care. However, when aboriginal children come into care we need to do a better job of recruiting aboriginal families. We also believe finding loving, qualified, permanent families should be the priority, regardless of the race of those families. Non-aboriginal families should be encouraged and helped to make cultural plans to nurture their children's culture. There are many wonderful adoptive

parents who are aboriginal and many wonderful adoptive parents who are not aboriginal, and they parent aboriginal children.

A few years ago, the wonderful Joan Glode, from Mi'kmaq Children and Family Services in Nova Scotia, told a group of adoptive parents, including me, that when she was working with Nova Scotia to write legislation pertaining to adoption, they defined an aboriginal family as a family having one or more members who are aboriginal. That brought tears to my eyes, and that's how I now describe my family. We became an aboriginal family when I adopted my children. In some parts of British Columbia and Alberta, first nations recognize this inclusive principle. They have in fact adopted non-aboriginal parents, welcoming them with a blanket ceremony. I think Yellowhead is one of those agencies that you heard about today. This is the approach I would like to see individuals, communities, and federal and provincial governments and their agencies adopt across the country. Instead of excluding, let's include.

Thank you.

● (0950)

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

You actually have a little bit of time left, so thank you. We'll share it around the table.

We'll now go to Mr. and Mrs. Loney.

**Ms. Joy Loney (As an Individual):** Thank you for allowing us this opportunity.

This morning when we all woke up, there were 30,000 children who woke up today who do not have a family to call their own. Why does this bother me, and why should this bother you? It is because these are Canadian children. As the mother of 14 children, it grieves me to think about a single child in this amazing country not having a family of its very own.

My name is Joy Loney, and my husband Dan and I have 14 children. Twelve years ago we opened our home to become foster parents. Little did we know the impact it would have upon our lives. Over the next six years, our family increased by six children, four of whom we were privileged to adopt. Three of these children are registered aboriginal children.

Of all families surveyed in Canada, 43% say they would consider adopting a child. This means there is a home for every child who is waiting to be adopted right here in Canada today. There are more than enough homes waiting to adopt children, but there are many bottlenecks in the way of those potential adoptions. Statistics from the United States show that 51% of kids who remain unadopted and age out of the foster system end up unemployed, 30% receive public assistance, and 25% are homeless. We expect the results in Canada to be similar. The cost to our society is evident in the failure to place children in homes that will support them, to help them avoid these outcomes.

As a mother, I bring to you the passion of a mother's heart for each of these children waiting to be adopted in Canada. We need the federal government to support the solutions to this national crisis.

My husband, Dan, will now address how this national crisis can be solved and what we need to do at the federal level.

**Mr. Dan Loney (As an Individual):** Good morning.

How do we solve this crisis? We believe the only way is to remove the bottlenecks that are involved in adoption and to address the fear, the frustration, and the finances that challenge us around adoption.

Fear can be eradicated by federal programs that support adopting families, providing education for every challenge they will face in the adoption, from attachment disorder issues to fetal alcohol syndrome and learning disabilities. We'd like to recommend that the federal government establish a web-based resource centre to support questions and supply education in all the challenges that adoptive parents will face. We suggest webinars to provide continuing education and to support adopting families to solve problems long before they occur in the growth of the adopted child. This resource could also include interactive blogs wherein adoptive parents could create an online support group for all families of adoption. The purpose of these initiatives is to remove the fear that many families face toward adopting Canadian children.

Frustration in dealing with bureaucracy must be minimized by expediting the adoption process from its current one-year to three-year timeline. Our own adoption of our four children took over four years, and the process was emotionally draining, due to the periods of uncertainty that the adoption process might fail. Could you imagine being pregnant for four years and having to manage the emotional roller coaster of expecting your child's arrival in your family to be finalized?

We need to have a central database for all children eligible for adoption in Canada at the federal level, to track statistics and progress of the adoptions in Canada. At this time there is no central point at the federal level keeping track of Canadian children, both in foster care and those up for adoption. This is why we never really know at any time how many kids are totally in the system. At the provincial level, kids are lost in the system by moving between provinces, and provinces do not communicate in keeping track of the children at risk. We believe this is very alarming.

Finances tend to be a huge concern for families interested in adoption. There is often a misconception that adopting children in Canada can be very costly and range between \$10,000 to \$30,000, as it is in foreign adoptions. Further concerns are that parents will be unable to financially support adopted children for expenses over their lifetime.

We would recommend the federal government look at providing tax credits for food, clothing, and transportation costs, to offset the increased costs that are incurred by adoptive families.

Housing tends to be the greatest cost and concern for families, and we would ask that this committee look at a Bank of Canada mortgage at prime rate over the life of a child to age 21, to assist with the housing costs of a growing family.

Many families have great concern over financing post-secondary education, and a scholarship for adopted children would alleviate this concern. This support from the government would be of great encouragement for families to adopt children, by helping minimize their financial concerns around adoption.

●(0955)

**Ms. Joy Loney:** So why am I so passionate about this issue? Three of our adopted children are Canadian registered aboriginal children, and these kids mean the world to us. This makes us think about all the other children, just like them, being denied adopted families because of their aboriginal status. How sad. This is truly a travesty.

In 2007, the number of aboriginal children in foster care was three times the number that were in residential schools at their height.

As a nation, we cannot afford to lose yet another generation of aboriginal children. Our own three aboriginal children are well on their way to going into their adult lives physically and emotionally healthy, while holding high school diplomas and the opportunity to follow their own dreams with higher education. We consider our adopted children to be the lucky children. They are growing up loved and secure. They are ready to take on life and find their own success. This is the hope we have for every child waiting to be adopted.

Every single child in Canada will one day grow up and either become a taxpayer or a tax burden. Today we have the opportunity to bring changes that will give each child the support he or she needs to become a taxpayer, who contributes to this amazing Canadian life, instead of a tax burden.

Every single Canadian child deserves parents in their corner, cheering and encouraging them on and believing in them. Let's not let this shame of 30,000 kids continue any longer. This truly is a Canadian issue that must be dealt with immediately. The children are depending on us. Our nation is depending on you to help us find some solutions.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

Now we'll go to Ms. Lewis, please.

**Ms. Jennifer Lewis (As an Individual):** Good morning.

My name is Jennifer Lewis, and I am really thankful for the opportunity to be here today and to share the story of my family.

I am a wife and a mother of four children, three naturally born and one adopted. My husband and I always knew that we would be adoptive parents; our idea was that at some point in our marriage we would add a little girl from China to our family. After three naturally born children and a wait time that was stretching on to four years for international adoption, we weighed the possibility and considered the age of our children, our desire being to keep them all close in age.

In the midst of this process, we heard about a little boy whose reality touched our hearts. This little boy had been born to a young, single mom, one who wasn't quite ready to lend her identity to motherhood and whose lifestyle was more party girl than consistent caregiver. Her son was almost two and seriously neglected.

The Children's Aid Society had been called on several occasions, but they felt he was not in danger, just not in the best situation. Their caseload had no room for a child in neglect because they had to focus on children in extreme cases.

She, as his mother, knew he was in trouble and she made the decision to break a cycle in her life of neglect and abuse. She reached out and said, "Please, is there someone who will take this child before I hurt him?" She's one of my heroes.

We said yes. We were naive, though. We were unqualified, but our hearts were wide open. He was a beautiful baby, and so full of rage, so full of hurt, so totally incapable of trusting anyone. He was almost two, and he made his bed, he cut his own fingernails, and he washed his own dishes, not because he was bright—even though he was—but because he had to.

When the process was started, we jumped in. We had no idea what was waiting for us—legally, mentally, emotionally, or physically. She chose us; she knew he was in danger and she wanted him in our family. We looked at finding a lawyer—that's how little we knew. Our searching led us to a private adoption agency that said it could help us, and because of the situation that we and he were facing, they said they could help us quickly by speeding up the process and doubling up on our home study sessions.

Two weeks after that initial phone call, that cry for help, we were meeting twice a week with a social worker and watching our family, our marriage, our children, and our history get picked apart and analyzed. We spent four months under an intense microscope. They questioned our motives, our communication, our parenting, and our marriage. We usually left those meetings feeling wrung out and completely bare, all the while knowing that his situation wasn't changing and he was facing the same neglect he had always endured. Sometimes I couldn't sleep for worry. He was one of my babies. I knew it even without having the chance to hold him yet.

We weren't the only ones dealing with the stress of transition. His birth mother, already having decided to give him up, just wanted it finished, and every morning it was harder and harder for her to face a day in this long goodbye. Near the end, she couldn't wait and terminated her rights before we were approved to bring him into our home, before it was legal for us to do so.

An emergency response was necessary, and we had to establish care for him every night for two weeks leading up to our approval. We didn't know when that was going to happen. A network of friends came forward and offered spare rooms so that he could spend the day with us and sleep somewhere else so that the process would not be jeopardized. This was agony for all of us. But once those beds were found, his birth mother chose the transition day—one that I will never forget.

No one will ever be able to convince me that children have less of an awareness than adults do. Sometimes I believe they are more keenly aware of what is happening. I know this was true of our little boy. He knew she was leaving him forever and he reacted like she was. I have never heard a cry like the one that came out of his little body that day—not before and not since. He shook with loss, he sobbed with loss, he fully understood loss, and a part of his heart was broken. That is what it sounded like, and six years later it is what we still face every once in a while—a broken heart, more ready to lash out at love than to receive it, and more able to test than to trust.

Once our rights as parents were established, two weeks after "leaving day", we thought he would be able to experience a smooth

transition into our family. We spent a year thinking that, every day, and every day his actions begged that we would reject him.

He had been broken from the only reality he had ever known and he wanted us to pay. If we hugged, he bit; if we praised, he ripped. He banged his head into walls and threw himself off stairs. He rolled screaming from one end of the room to the other for hours and hours, sometimes for the entire time he was awake.

● (1000)

We loved and we cried and we despaired and we held on harder. We were told that he had an attachment disorder, but no one needed to tell us that because we lived it. When I considered the attachment I had to my other children, to his brother and sisters, I remembered the time spent holding them as infants, rocking them and cradling them. So we wrapped him in his snuggie and we held him. And he screamed. And we held him longer.

The stress was overwhelming. The bar for adopting had been set so high that we felt as though we were barely approved as parents. We felt like we were failing him. Our children were stressed. All of them had been eagerly anticipating this little brother and he had rejected each one of them in turn. So as a family we decided to make lists of what we were thankful for in him so that we could yell those things out in the midst of his fits. He had an amazing laugh. He giggled. He loved to help. He made us laugh. And when he disconnected from us, those things kept us holding on.

Six years later, because this is a story of hope and it is one of love, this little guy still loves to laugh, and he loves to make us laugh. He has come so far.

Our first year as adoptive parents was full of stress, love, tears, victories, tragedies, and triumphs, a year that needed our complete focus, our undivided attention, and all of our time. We needed this transitional time to bring a little boy from a painful place to a place of belonging. We needed this time to become a family. And we faced things in this transition that no one could have prepared us for, but we came out of it stronger than we could have ever imagined.

Children need all the support we can give them, and parents who bring a child into their homes by heart choice need to be able to focus on that child. We are whole as a family. We're not perfect, but we're whole, and that would not have happened without consistent time and effort. It is a worthy investment.

I believe the strength of a nation is built on the strength of its families and the hope of its future is built on the health and well-being of its children. With these two things in mind, I believe the government can ease transition for adoptive parents and their children by removing some of the stressors that diminish our focus, both financially and socially.

By recognizing the limitations and legislating on an issue that falls primarily to the provinces, I hold to the belief that Canada can be unified by a decision for our children that crosses the federal-provincial divide—transitional leave for parents and a nation-wide effort to unify adoption strategies that are expressed so differently among the provinces—because the journey from brokenness to mending is a beautiful one, and it's one that we should all support and engage in.

Thank you.

• (1005)

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

I want to thank you all for sharing your stories. It's very emotional for all of you to have lived through it, for us to hear it, but it is a story of hope, and I think it's important that we hear it, as emotional as it is. We're not used to being emotional in these kinds of terms, so I think it's good for all of us. Thank you.

We will have some questions for you. I think we'll do a five-minute round to start with, and that will include the questions and the answers.

We'll begin with Mr. Savage, please.

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

We're not actually in the Parliament Buildings, but we're in Parliament, and a lot of the things we do seem disconnected from what's really happening out there. When we hear folks like you come and talk about how you've been touched and how your families have grown, it's very touching for all of us.

As you were speaking, Ms. Lewis, I could see other panel members listening and I think fighting back tears and thinking about their own experiences. I see people in our audience today, and even members of this panel, who know what you were talking about. For those of us who have two children, like me, it's hard to imagine what it's like to have four, let alone 14.

We understand there's a 30,000 child backlog of adopted kids. Can you take them all?

**Mr. Dan Loney:** She will.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Michael Savage:** I suspect you would take as many as you could.

You have 14 children. You mentioned three were aboriginal children. How many are adopted out of the 14?

**Ms. Joy Loney:** Four.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** A total of four are adopted?

**Mr. Dan Loney:** Yes.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** You have ten kids plus four adopted kids?

**Ms. Joy Loney:** No, we're including in that five foster children who are permanent.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Five permanent foster children.

**Ms. Joy Loney:** One is aged out.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Okay. That's quite a family, 14. What's Christmas going to be like at your place?

**Ms. Joy Loney:** Amazing.

**Mr. Dan Loney:** As one friend says, Christmas is like being at Walmart.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** I imagine you all have a wonderful time at Christmas and other holidays. It's amazing to hear how much a heart can open up and how much it can take in. It's inspiring to all of us.

Ms. Lewis, what do people go through when they adopt? What makes them adopt? You've told us that. I think this is an important part of our study. At the very end, you recommended that "the government can ease transition for adoptive parents and their children by removing some of the stressors that diminish our focus, financially and socially". The Loneys mentioned web-based resource centres, expediting the adoption process, the central database, tax credits for expenses, mortgage costs, scholarships, things like that. We've heard from other people that we really don't have enough national information to make it easier for people to adopt. We've heard, time and again, that it's actually easier to adopt internationally than it is interprovincially in Canada. There is the idea of the central database. Is that one of the things that we need to do, so that people know what the need is, what the potential is? Would that make it easier for people to adopt children? I ask anybody at the panel.

• (1010)

**Mr. Dan Loney:** There's one personal situation that we've encountered. Certain people know that if they change provinces, they come out from under the surveillance of the authorities and child care agencies. We feel that social workers have encouraged abusive parents to move to another province, because moving takes these parents off their caseload. Those children slip under the radar. They enter into another province and there is no awareness that there is a child care problem. We feel that there should be a national identification system for children who are at risk and need to be adopted. When they change provinces, everything starts all over again.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** I just want to say that I hope you all have a great Christmas and a wonderful time. I know it's a great time at my house with two children. It must be exponentially wonderful with 14, and maybe you'll have more than that by Christmas. Who knows?

**Mr. Dan Loney:** We are trying to adopt two more right now. We are experiencing some of the frustration that I heard from our witnesses this morning. We have two little boys in British Columbia who are siblings to the four adopted children we have. We have had resistance from, we believe, one government provincial worker, who has stopped the adoption. So the children remain in foster care, and the two little boys keep being moved from home to home. They have been returned to the reserve, extricated from the reserve, and put back into foster care. All the while, our four children ask, "Mum and Dad, when are our little brothers going to come home?" There are times of wonderful joy and wonderful experiences, but there's also an ongoing frustration. We just want to be parents. We just want to love children. We want to take care of them. We want to do what comes naturally in a family situation. Sometimes dealing with the bureaucracy can be emotionally draining and exasperating.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Madam Beaudin.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good morning to all. Thank you for being here.

It was indeed very touching to listen to you this morning. You are outstanding people and parents, and that is very nice to see.

I have one or two important questions regarding the solutions you suggested in order for you to get the help and support you need. I would like to know, first of all, if you have access to mutual help networks, support networks of adoptive parents. I know that such networks exist within the Canadian Council. I seem to remember that you said the last time that its funding had stopped, but are there any other types of networks?

Ms. Lewis, you have biological children and also adopted ones. Did you get the same amount of leave in both cases? Could you start answering this, Ms. Lewis and deal next with the support groups?

[*English*]

**Ms. Jennifer Lewis:** I think what you're asking is whether there would have been a benefit to an extended leave for adopting. Absolutely. I don't think that the emotional or the stress aspect of adopting is taken into consideration when it comes to leave or parental leave. I understand that the terminology is touchy right now, and I understand that there are legal aspects to it, but I also believe that adopting.... You know, you recover from birth. There are still bruises from the adoption process. I don't know how else to describe it. You're emotionally stressed. There's a worry connected to adoption, because throughout the process, at any time it can be terminated. That is an overwhelming shadow.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** Excuse me, was the parental leave of the same length?

[*English*]

**Ms. Jennifer Lewis:** No, and to be honest with you, I'm sharing my transitional experience, but at this point, I was home already, so I wouldn't have benefited. This isn't about what I experienced, but it is about establishing something that will make adoption more something that people would consider, something that would encourage people to participate in the process of it instead of being overwhelmed by the roadblocks to it.

•(1015)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** Thank you.

Yes?

[*English*]

**Ms. Laura Eggertson:** Can I just answer the question, Madam Chair, on resources and networks? I know that Cindy Blackstock referred to some amazing post-adoption supports that we're supposed to have out there that don't exist for aboriginal parents on reserves. There's a lack of post-adoption supports generally everywhere. I think Nova Scotia has just hired a post-adoption support worker for the entire province, but there are very few out there. There are parent networks, and there are parental support groups, which are largely

volunteer-run, and we, as the Adoption Council of Canada, do have some resources. We are kind of doing what Dan had suggested should happen. We are a sort of clearing house for information and resources, and we would love to be able to offer more resources such as webinars and seminars, and to host a database, which we're talking about, but we don't have the federal funding or any kind of funding right now to do that.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** Thank you.

In your view, what was the greatest challenge before, during and after adoption? If you had to identify the greatest challenges that we would need to meet as a government, what would they be?

[*English*]

**Ms. Joy Loney:** Our biggest challenge was just the fear factor, when you have to go through so many levels to make this adoption happen. In our case, we had the children in our home, but because they were aboriginal.... There were aboriginal children being removed from the foster homes when the adoption procedures began. Those children were being taken to the reserves. In our case the children came to us as newborns. We had these children as newborn babies, and we ran the risk of the band denying us the opportunity to adopt these children. It's very scary.

There are nights you do not sleep, because you hold these children.... Nobody can guarantee that it's going to happen, and you want to do what's right for the kids. So when you step out...and at times we said maybe we'll just continue fostering, because if we continue fostering and we don't make any waves, the children will stay here. But it's not in the children's best interest. The children need to have their own identity. Yes, they're aboriginal and they need to have that, but they need to have Mom and Dad. They need to relax. Our kids' grades went up. Their behaviours dropped off. They're home, and that's what every single child deserves, to grow up to be healthy and well-adjusted people in our communities.

Thank you.

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

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin:** I too wish your family very happy holidays.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thanks.

Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** We've heard a lot over the last couple of weeks about what's needed. We've heard about extending the leave—the parental leave—for adoptive parents and the networks of support and all of that. Today I think we're into a bit of a different discussion, from two perspectives, from the previous group and you, about the importance of keeping children connected to their roots.

I have four children. You mentioned a scholarship for education. I think as parents there are two things you give your children, among a lot of other things. One is a sense of who they are—their roots, their culture, and all that—and one, of course, is their wings, which is their education. Hopefully, if you give them both of those, they'll make their way.



I guess there needs to be, obviously, in my view, a further conversation, of a constructive nature, with our aboriginal folks, who fear losing their children and fear losing their culture if they lose their children. It has an impact on parents and communities. That is versus your want to nurture and care for and bring these children up and give them a chance at something positive in their lives.

Do you want to talk to me a bit further about that?

• (1020)

**Mr. Dan Loney:** Joy, my wife, is of Cherokee descent, so I think she speaks to that. We have always, in our home, had native culture. She was raised with it as a child, and we think it's very important.

I'm Irish Canadian of Irish-Scottish Canadian descent. And we celebrate that in our family, as do our adopted children. They are not only aboriginal. Their mother is Honduran. We celebrate in our family the Mayan culture, the Latino culture, because our children are half-Honduran. It's very important.

You can't deny your culture. It gives you your roots. I also believe that this is the strength of our nation. We are a multicultural society, and we don't need to have differences. We need to embrace those different cultures, and that is the unity and the fibre of our nation.

**Ms. Laura Eggertson:** Mr. Martin, I'd like to also address that, if I could.

We don't need to be pitted against one another, and that is the political climate that is happening right now from both sides. Nobody's particularly at fault. I completely understand and empathize with the first nations, who don't want to lose their children and their culture.

What I know is that if my kid has to be locked in a closet by her mother—her birth mother—to keep her safe, she's at risk. And she needs to be cared for and given permanency and security when her birth mother cannot give it to her. That's the crisis that's happening right now for many of our children. That's a reality.

You know what? Neglect does even more damage than abuse of a physical or sexual nature, in many cases. The research shows us that, too. This is not neglect because people want to be neglecting their children.

They are absolutely right. Cindy and the other witness you heard from this morning are absolutely right about the need for prevention and poverty reduction and support for first nations individuals and families. But we also need to keep those children safe. We don't have any legislative barriers in our country to interracial marriage. Why do we have legislative and political barriers to interracial families? We can be inclusive.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** I have just one quick....

**The Chair:** I think you have about 50 seconds left, Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** You have 14 children. I have four. How do you afford to do that?

**Mr. Dan Loney:** I have my own business. I'm a consultant, and we're very blessed that our business provides for that. Our family receives money for foster care for our foster children as well.

**Ms. Joy Loney:** We have to say, too, that the children range from 31 down to eight. They're not all at home.

**Mr. Dan Loney:** Do we have eight in the house right now?

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Dan Loney:** All of them come home for Christmas. With grandchildren, we're about 32 for Christmas dinner.

**Ms. Joy Loney:** That's grandchildren and grandparents.

**The Chair:** Before I go to Mr. Watson, may I ask how many grandchildren you have?

**Ms. Joy Loney:** We have six.

**The Chair:** Look at these young, beautiful grandparents. Well, that's wonderful.

Go ahead, Mr. Watson, please.

**Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to our witnesses. I love all this discussion of children. My wife is the youngest of eight. Her father is now a grandfather to 56, and more are on the way. This is good—14 kids—but I'm getting sidetracked.

Ms. Lewis, thank you for helping me completely unravel here on this side of the witness table during your testimony.

I have a few things I want to try to get to in a very brief amount of time, so I'll ask you to keep your responses brief, if possible, and I will try to keep my questions brief.

There's one area that I think needs a little bit of exploration here, and it is around the transitional measure for adoption—transitional leave, or some sort of benefit.

Within the employment insurance system, parental leave deals with issues of attachment and care of the children, and it can be shared among caregivers, the mother and father. Maternity leave was given as something unique, recognizing, as the courts have said, the physiological aspects of giving birth and the need for recovery, for example. That's why biological mothers who give their children up for adoption get maternity leave but not parental.

In establishing some sort of transitional leave or adoption leave benefit, or whatever it's going to be called, I'm presuming, from my vantage point, that there needs to be some kind of substantiation of why that should be offered to adoptive parents or caregivers, as opposed to being lumped into the parental issue.

Ms. Lewis, I think some of your testimony has gotten to this already.

Ms. Eggertson, I don't know whether you have biological children as well as your adopted children. What is different from the parent's vantage point? What are the unique challenges you face as a parent, perhaps on the psychological side of things, that you didn't experience with biological children? If you can, plumb the depths of that a little bit for us.

•(1025)

**Ms. Joy Loney:** When we adopted the four, two came as newborns. That was easy. You're not dealing with any attachment issues. The children who come at two and a half and four and a half have attachment issues. They're upset, and it's no fault of their own. It is emotionally draining to hold these crying kids. They don't have words to describe their feelings. You never know if you're doing it exactly right, and all you can do is keep going forward and keep hoping, and just loving and loving and loving.

**Ms. Jennifer Lewis:** It's a process and an experience that is bruising. I don't think there's any other word for it. Every time you take a step forward, you're beaten back. I know it isn't the fault of the child, but there is absolutely an inability of these children to receive love. They don't trust love. They certainly don't expect that love is continuous, that it will keep going. It's almost as though they try to force your hand.

In experiences we had with our son, we'd say, "Wow, that's a great picture", and he would look at us and tear it to shreds, because even that positive reinforcement on such a small level was too much for him to take. I believe—

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Are there difficulties for parents in attaching with the children?

**Ms. Jennifer Lewis:** Yes, absolutely, and I think we need to address that more honestly sometimes, because when you're spat at every single day, although the love never goes away, the ability to keep standing in the midst of it is extremely difficult. When you feel as though you're failing a child, it's easy to give in to that feeling if you don't have support around you to tell you to keep going. That support is key.

I don't know if that was your experience, but there were days when I did feel like a failure, and I'm not ashamed to say that. This was a situation for which I was ill-equipped. I think that's the best word for it. Every step forward, as I said, you're beaten back. It's at a level that you don't comprehend until you're experiencing it. Knowing that other people have experienced it helps to keep you in the right place, but it is difficult to attach to a child who is unwilling to attach.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Watson. That's all the time.

We, unfortunately, don't have time for another round, but with the committee's indulgence, Madam Minna has just a very quick question of clarification. If it's okay with the committee, I'm just going to allow her to quickly ask that question.

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

For Mr. Loney, if I could, you mentioned earlier the tax credit for food, clothing, and so on, and then you mentioned Bank of Canada mortgages for housing. Were you referring to the adoption of first nations to assist with first nations children, or all adoptions?

**Mr. Dan Loney:** All adoptions.

**Hon. Maria Minna:** It is irrespective. I just wanted to clarify that.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Chair, on a point of order, I wonder, before the Loneys leave, if they'd read the 14 names of their kids into the record.

I want to see if you both know all those names.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Dan Loney:** I would pass the name test. I would fail the birthday test.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Can you read in the names of your kids?

**Ms. Joy Loney:** Yes. Aaron, Andrea, Sean, Daniel, Stephen, Tia, Silas, Sarah, Josiah, Jenny, Kendra, DJ, Jesse and Chris.

**Hon. Maria Minna:** That's it?

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** That was good. It was a very good suggestion, Mr. Savage.

Thank you all so much. As I said, we're political and we're doing all of our political things that we do and we think somehow we're providing leadership, but when I look at you, in our country you are the great leaders. I just want to thank all of you for being here. Thank you for what you're doing, and on behalf of all of us, merry Christmas and a wonderful new year. Thank you again.

We will suspend for a moment, and then we'll go into committee business. Thank you.

• \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

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•(1030)

**The Chair:** Members, we have some business that we need to take care of, and we have until 10:45. I can't stay any longer, so could everyone please take their seats?

We are not in camera. We are public.

Mr. Martin, you have a motion that you wanted to move.

**Mr. Tony Martin:** I will table that motion for the time being, Chair, if you don't mind.

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

Then we have a motion from Mr. Savage. Do you want to move that?

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

I'm prepared to not have this debated now if the committee would rather.... I would table this as well for the time being.

Should I read it into the record? What would you suggest?

•(1035)

**The Chair:** If you're not going to move it, there isn't any reason to. I'm just wondering if we should start some discussion on it, though. Are you actually saying you'd be prepared to move it on Thursday?

**Mr. Michael Savage:** No. If Mr. Martin is deferring his, then I will read mine in and we can have some discussion on it.

**The Chair:** We have 10 minutes. Why don't we start the discussion, and then we would have to finish it on Thursday.

Mr. Lessard, do you have a point of order?

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** This is not a point of order, Madam Chair. It has to do with Mr. Martin's motion that we have before us. I am of the same view as Mr. Savage. I believe it would be better to postpone this discussion. When we asked the House of Commons to refer Bill C-304 to the committee, we had agreed to draft an amendment.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Martin did not move his motion, so we are not dealing with Mr. Martin's motion at this time.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** You had talked about Mr. Martin's motion, that is why. I am sorry.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. No, he decided not to. He is not moving it right now, so we are dealing with Mr. Savage's motion.

We have about 10 minutes. Please go ahead.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Thank you, Chair. I'll read the motion.

**The Chair:** Yes, go ahead.

**Mr. Michael Savage:** The motion is that:

The Committee requests that the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development appear before the Committee for two hours as soon as possible to discuss the Conservative government's new policy of eliminating a senior citizens' ability to exempt Registered Retirement Income Funds (RRIF) from the calculation of GIS eligibility through the use of the "option provision" as otherwise allowed in the Old Age Security Act and the consequences this will have on seniors who receive Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) payments.

This comes about from information that was disclosed, or became more public, a couple of weeks ago that seniors would be very significantly burdened by having their GIS eligibility and the amount of money they would collect from GIS affected by taking money out of their RRIF. I can recall seniors who are very severely poor by any standard, and to further impoverish them by affecting their GIS through this I think is particularly punitive.

The minister indicated in the House that she was going to have a review of this. But what we need to do is find out how this came about in the first place. Apparently it's a change that's been made very quietly and it affects an awful lot of people, among them the poorest seniors in the country. So I think it's worth having some discussion on this and bringing the minister forward to talk about it.

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

Mr. Komarnicki.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** There's no doubt that there had been an administrative change made. The minister was quite clear in her responses. I think others answered questions in the House that this change was reviewed and the decision was made to revert back to the situation as it was in May of 2010, I believe. To the extent that there were any concerns, it certainly wasn't something that at the cabinet or ministerial level was approved as a policy going forward. It's obvious that the decision, to the extent it was made, has been reversed. So why we would want to interject that issue now, in the middle of a study that we're doing for the next number of meetings in relation to adoption, is something I wouldn't approve of.

It seems to me the issue has been dealt with. It was one that was raised, I think by a member of Mr. Savage's party. When you raise an issue you expect the minister or the government to have a look at it and take some action with respect to that. I would think that by raising the issue and then the minister reacting in such a quick fashion to address that concern...it is not something that should be the subject of further discussion and review before this committee, at least at this time.

If there were other developments, and perhaps when we return in the new year—I know there would appear to be no apparent emerging need to discuss this issue at this time. So for that reason, I don't think much is to be gained, except perhaps if the motives are otherwise. But it would be my view that this motion and the request in it would not be appropriate at this time, especially given the clear, unequivocal comments made in the House by those who have something to do with this. Quite frankly, as I recall it, the question in the House was not only to review it but to take some action, with the understanding that it would be to reverse the situation back to where it was. That's indeed what happened, in a relatively short period of time. It's unequivocal. It's clear. So to try to go through that process I think would be inappropriate at this time, and that's my view.

• (1040)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Lessard, and then Mr. Savage.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** In order for us to make up our mind, Madam Chair... I will wait for Mr. Komarnicki to pay attention because I have a question for him.

In order to make up our mind, Madam Chair, we would like the answers to two questions. One will be for Mr. Komarnicki and one for Mr. Savage.

Mr. Komarnicki, are you announcing this morning that the minister has definitely decided not to implement this measure? If your answer is yes, I will now direct my other question to Mr. Savage. Is this motion still necessary since we are being told this morning that this measure has been definitively withdrawn?

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Savage, would you allow Mr. Komarnicki to answer? You are next on the speaking list, so you can have—

**Mr. Michael Savage:** Because one of the questions was from me, I'll go next, and then he can go, in case we run out of time. But I look forward to his answer.

Yes, there's very much a need. The question is, what happened here, and is this going to happen again? How do decisions like this get made that affect the poorest of the poor in our country? If this was a decision that wasn't made at the cabinet level or the ministerial level, that makes it even more important to find out how this happened and carried on for a long period of time.

It's to the good credit of Gerry Byrne, who raised this in the House and brought this issue to light. He has rightly deserved and received some credit for what he's done.

But the question is, how does this happen? Is it happening with EI? Is it happening with the disability tax credit? Who's making these decisions? How does a decision like this get made? It's fine to say thank you to the Liberal Party for raising it and we'll fix it in this case, but what happened here? We need to find out what happened in this case and how a decision can happen that is so detrimental to people who have very little voice.

How do we know it's not going to happen with other measures, in other parts of this huge department? This is one of the biggest departments of government, making decisions on education and many other issues that affect the lives of Canadians who are disabled, seniors, living in poverty. The question is, what happened here? Why did it happen?

I think it's incumbent upon this committee, and, frankly, I think it's part of the fiduciary responsibility of this committee, to find out what happened in a case this serious.

**The Chair:** Mr. Komarnicki, did you want to answer the question?

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Sure. I think there is no question that unequivocally the policy has been cancelled. It is not going forward. To answer Mr. Lessard's question directly, that's the fact; that's the answer.

It makes this question another matter. I think if Mr. Savage wishes to put a question, with an answer from the minister, he's certainly entitled to do that through a question on the order paper. He can proceed that way, if he wishes.

The fact of the matter is we're obviously all concerned about the effect that may have had on seniors. We're concerned about our seniors in this country. They have played a vital role, and they continue to play a vital role.

We know that during this particular time in the economy, with the recession we've had and so on, it is particularly sensitive, and we have been particularly sensitive, and we have taken a number of measures—

**The Chair:** Mr. Komarnicki, I'm going to have to stop you, but when we return you will be able to continue speaking. We are at the end of our time and we have another committee waiting to come in. We'll deal with this on Thursday.

As well, we have a motion from Mr. Lessard we're going to be dealing with, and we'll possibly have Mr. Martin's. We'll finish with this one and we'll deal with our other motions as well as the long-form census.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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