



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

FEWO • NUMBER 048 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, February 23, 2017

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Chair

Ms. Marilyn Gladu

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•(0845)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Good morning, colleagues.

How exciting: we are going to be considering our first bill in committee.

We have with us our legislative clerk, Justin Vaive. We appreciate his help.

We also want to welcome our colleague Sven Spengemann, who has brought forward his bill on gender equality week.

We'll begin with comments from Mr. Spengemann and then go into a round of questioning.

You have 10 minutes. You may begin.

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Madam Chair and distinguished members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, I thank you for this opportunity to speak on my private member's bill, Bill C-309, an act to establish Gender Equality Week.

It's a great honour for me to appear before you today, not only in my capacity as the member of Parliament for Mississauga—Lakeshore, but also because, in my view, this is a real opportunity to have a profoundly positive impact on Canadian society.

Before elaborating, Madam Chair, I would like to take a moment to thank my team here in Ottawa and in my constituency for their dedicated work in bringing this bill to where it is today.

Adrian Zita-Bennett is my executive and legislative assistant, and he did much of the heavy lifting on the consultation and the development of the text of this bill. My amazing team in the constituency office—Dulce Santos, Hanan Harb, Leslie Peres, and Kyra Brennan—engaged our community in Mississauga—Lakeshore and supported us each step of the way.

Madam Chair, I would also like to thank Strength in Stories, which is a grassroots organization that helped to inspire this bill, and particularly its co-founder, Rachele Bergen.

In addition, local and national stakeholders such as non-profit organizations, women's shelters, and all levels of government provided feedback that was critical in developing the preambular paragraphs of this bill.

My team and I felt that making frank and compelling mention of the full scope of gender-based inequalities that persist in Canada was an essential step to ensure that gender equality week will be effective in delivering two things: national engagement and prospective solutions.

The reason for this, Madam Chair, is simple. Solving any given problem first requires full recognition of the existence of the problem and of its scope. We need to be able to call problems by their names and be frank and open when tackling the challenges that we continue to face.

[Translation]

I am sure the members of this committee are not at all surprised to hear stakeholders tell them we still have a lot of work to do to create a more gender-equality-based society. I would like to cite some facts that reinforce that perception.

In the Global Gender Report it has published every year since 2006, the World Economic Forum reveals the scope of existing gender gaps and the efforts being made to close them, particularly in the fields of health, education, economic participation, economic prospects, and political empowerment. According to the 2016 report, which the forum published last October, Canada ranks 35th out of 144 countries, between Luxembourg and Cape Verde, but 1st in North America.

Madam Chair and distinguished members of the committee, we, as Canadians, must also acknowledge that the wage gap between men and women undermines our economy and the global economy. People around the world increasingly recognize that gender inequality is a major stumbling block.

According to a report the Royal Bank published in 2005, the lost income potential of Canadian women due to the wage gap is about \$126 billion a year. A report published by the UBS financial services corporation last October states that global economic performance would rise by £10 billion if the wage gap between men and women were closed. Similarly, according to a report issued by the McKinsey Global Institute in September 2015, promoting gender equality would add £12 billion to global GDP by 2025.

• (0850)

[English]

Gender equality week can work to achieve what more and more international organizations and governments around the world are advocating: that the elimination of gender gaps will lead to strong and lasting economic benefits. As a 2013 International Monetary Fund report on women's participation in the global labour market put it, "The challenges of growth, job creation, and inclusion are closely intertwined."

Here in Canada, gender-based inequalities have become ingrained in the fabric of our society, and if we do not address them directly, they will continue to persist.

Canadians of minority gender identity and expression are often faced with these challenges in an even more profound manner, and on the predicament of indigenous Canadians, Madam Chair, a 2015 RCMP report outlines that indigenous women make up just over 4% of our population and yet account for 16% of female homicides and 11% of missing Canadian women.

The acknowledgement of these outcomes goes far beyond partisan affiliation. All of us bear some responsibility in a society that categorically and systematically treats and values genders differently.

In short, if we truly seek to address these challenges, a pivotal first step is to recognize them frankly and understand them fully.

Second, the federal government cannot solve these problems by itself. Gender equality requires awareness and engagement on the part of all Canadians. To be clear, I'm very proud of the leadership of our Prime Minister and the federal government, who are working to address systemic gender-based gaps that have shaped Canada since Confederation.

[Translation]

The Prime Minister has achieved gender parity in cabinet for the first time in the history of Canada. Also for the first time, he appointed a woman as Leader of the Government in the House and a female minister who will focus exclusively on gender equality issues.

The Canadian government has launched an inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women, and the Minister of Status of Women is developing a national strategy to combat gender-based violence. The government has also begun to implement the gender-based analysis plus tool, or GBA+, in all federal government organizations to ensure the aspects of this issue are taken into consideration in all government programs, policies, and statutes.

The Canadian government has tabled Bill C-16, currently being debated in the Senate, which protects Canadians who belong to minority groups distinguished by gender identity or gender expression by adding gender identity and gender expression to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination as defined in the Canadian Human Rights Act.

In early December 2016, the Governor of the Bank of Canada, the Minister of Finance, and the Minister of Status of Women announced that Viola Desmond, a Nova Scotian businesswoman and civil rights

champion, will be the first woman to appear on a Canadian bank note.

Internationally, Canada has done its share as part of the UN Commission on the Status of Women and vigorously supports the HeForShe solidarity campaign launched by that organization.

Once again, I tip my hat to the leadership of our Prime Minister and the Canadian government in promoting gender equality.

[English]

But, Madam Chair, this is a cause on which all Canadians must lead. This is the thrust of the bill before you today. Government cannot do this work alone, and the mere passing of legislation without public recognition of and engagement with the challenges we face will be insufficient.

You may rightly wonder what exactly an annual gender equality week might look like. Each year across the 338 federal ridings in our country, gender equality week can inspire girls, boys, men, women, and those of minority gender identity and expression to take part in a dialogue to establish a more inclusive society. If we work together, Madam Chair, we can find solutions.

As parliamentarians we can use this designated week to deepen relationships and collaborate with our community leaders and advocacy groups. This work could take the form of community town halls and debates, research proposals, television and social media reports, fundraising initiatives, marches, arts and music, and other forms of advocacy. Through its emphasis on fostering local community-based dialogue on gender equality, we can also serve to strengthen current federal initiatives and communities across our country.

In my riding of Mississauga—Lakeshore, young people as well as seniors have participated in the development of the bill that is before you today. Members of our youth council have specifically expressed concern about the difficulties faced by women in entering and excelling in the workforce. Leaders in our community of seniors could play a big part in an annual gender equality week. They have seen first-hand how attitudes and policies have and have not changed with respect to gender equality, and their input would be critical to eliminating gender-based disparities, including poverty, for the next generation and beyond.

Madam Chair, our great country is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year. Canada has achieved so much since Confederation, yet on the issue of gender equality and equity, there's still so much more to achieve.

Bill C-309, An Act to establish Gender Equality Week, is an effort to raise collective awareness of existing gender-based inequality and to work toward the establishment of a more inclusive society.

● (0855)

We need to be able to identify problems in a frank manner and understand that governments cannot solve the issues alone. This is an effort on which we must all lead, and we have before us an opportunity to achieve real progress in our communities and across our country.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I look forward to the committee's questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll begin our first round of questioning with my colleague Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): I will be switching my time with Mr. Fraser. Thank you.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Spengemann, for appearing today, but more importantly, for putting forward this interesting and exciting private member's bill.

One of the things that I found in my experience on this committee, although there are some notable exceptions, is that it's striking how few men and little men are engaged in the discussion of gender equality. I see a huge opportunity for men to take a leadership role in partnership with the women who have been championing gender equality for their careers.

Can you perhaps elaborate on how having a gender equality week can help provide a platform to engage men and boys in championing equality, as well as potentially educating young men and boys in the importance of their role in promoting equality in Canadian society?

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thank you very much for the question. Thank you for your support of this bill at first and second reading.

It is absolutely critical. Not only can governments not do it alone, but women can't do it alone. Men have to stand by the side of women on each aspect of this very complex issue that we have before us. It does go all the way back to elementary school education.

When I was first approached by one of the co-inspirators of the bill, the question was whether we could do something in the field of education to put gender equality week into primary and secondary school programming. That was a provincial issue, so I wasn't able to address it directly as a federal member of Parliament.

The discussion then evolved to creating this project before you, gender equality week. By declaring this week, we can indeed inspire. We can't prescribe it, but we can certainly inspire education to come online during that one week and make sure that all the way from the elementary level onwards, there are projects and focused discussions during that week on the issue of gender equality. Starting at a young age is very important.

There are other challenges. I alluded in my discussion to economic opportunity. I think that in itself is an opportunity to bring men into the discussion in a substantively focused way. The financial industry itself is male dominated. Recognizing the economic opportunity to create pay equity, for example, globally in the trillions of dollars, really is one vehicle by which to broaden the conversation to bring men to the table.

Those are just two aspects. There are many others.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Okay. Excellent.

I noticed in the preamble of the bill and during your remarks this morning as well that you focused a little bit on different sectors of Canadian society—for an example, indigenous women. Could you explain how the intersectional nature of gender inequality could be remedied with the celebration of a gender equality week?

Mr. Sven Spengemann: I'm not sure. It's very aspirational to talk about remedies right away, but I think what you're pointing to is really the opportunity to raise awareness, not just on the part of men and boys, but to the raise awareness of non-indigenous Canadians of the plight of our indigenous populations, specifically indigenous women. Some of that is making its way into curricula, into education. Again, education is the starting point. This measure will also raise awareness more broadly across society that there are groups of women—indigenous women being one of them, new Canadians of insular ethnic cultural minorities being another, and a third group, women seniors, being another—who are even more profoundly affected by gender inequality than women at large.

I think it's very important to really drill down into the details and develop some very concrete solutions for these sub-problems. I think the GBA+ initiative, the gender-based analysis that is now practised in the federal government, is a very important step towards that goal.

● (0900)

Mr. Sean Fraser: One of the other items you mentioned that resonates very well with me is the fact that Viola Desmond will be featured on the \$10 bill. Just by coincidence, the incident that gave rise to her becoming a human rights icon in Canada took place in my hometown in New Glasgow.

One of the things that I think is important but perhaps understated is the fact that symbolic gestures by a federal government or by members of society can lead to positive social change. Can you perhaps explain how either a gender equality week or initiatives like putting a Canadian woman on currency can actually lead to a shift in attitudes over time in Canadian society?

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Symbolism matters deeply. It's symbolism combined with action, really, that will provide the solutions. It should be habitual that we see leading women on our Canadian symbols, and putting the first Canadian woman on a banknote is a very good start. It was absolutely well overdue but necessary, in a very deep sense, in order to make progress.

But it's not just symbolism; it's more than that. This is where the 338 federal ridings come into play. This is really an opportunity for all of us around the table and all our colleagues in the House of Commons to look at our constituencies to see what symbols we have, historically and locally, and what symbols we can still create, and then combine that with really concrete pathways to action. As I said in my remarks, it may involve a protest, or it may result in research by graduate students on some of the data gaps that we have been profiling during gender equality week.

I think that's another very important aspect of this bill that I didn't touch upon in my opening remarks. We are missing some data, especially on the populations of minority women who are facing specific challenges.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I have one final question as we wrap up here.

The region that I represent is characterized by small towns and rural communities. Equality initiatives tend to benefit from the size of a population in a big urban centre.

What can small communities do to help celebrate gender equality during the week, assuming that this bill becomes law?

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Again, it's up to us as federal parliamentarians to take some initiative to work with our organizers and our community leaders in small communities to see what can be done, and what can be done physically. Social media are a great tool, but this is not limited to social media. Even small communities now have reach through various channels of communication and through Parliament itself and our provincial legislatures to be profiled more broadly and nationally. I think that type of work is very important to ensuring that there isn't going to be a rural/urban divide on the issue of gender equality.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Excellent. Thank you very much.

The Chair: We'll go to my colleague Ms. Vecchio for seven minutes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Thanks very much.

Thank you very much for this bill. I will be supporting this bill, but there are a few things I want to get some data and information on.

In the preamble on page 1, in lines 24 through 29, you indicate:

Whereas the effects of poverty and vulnerability are exacerbated by limited access for women and their families to affordable housing,...

Can you give me data on that? I recognize it is an issue, and they're dealing with different issues, but what exactly are you referring to as limited access?

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thank you very much for that question, Ms. Vecchio, and thank you also for your support for this bill at first and second reading.

As you can appreciate, a private member's bill is not an opportunity to do exhaustive research. Data is very important, and we've really very carefully developed a preamble that is supported by data but that also doesn't become too statistically driven. It's open for interpretation and open for emphasis, again, in our various ridings, depending on what initiatives we would like to pursue during gender equality week.

This information actually came to us from Women's College Hospital. I can certainly provide the exact written feedback from that group to the committee if that would be helpful. The focus there was primarily, but not exclusively, access to mental health services.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Absolutely. Would we find the same access...?

Yes, send that our way; that would be wonderful.

I want to go on to page 2, lines 8 and 9:

Whereas Canadian women face barriers in pursuing and completing post-secondary education...

The testimony we heard through our study was that 61% of post-secondary graduates in Canada are women. It was also that we are seeing increasing levels of people doing master's and Ph.D. degrees as well.

What are these barriers that you're mentioning? We see that statistics do not support that, so can you please provide the data or the research that you have on that?

●(0905)

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Absolutely.

There are two aspects to it. First of all, this preamble paragraph is really aimed at the STEM field, and I think there is strong data out there to support that. The other aspect was that this was a preambular paragraph that captured comments from our indigenous women. Access to and being able to complete post-secondary education is a particular aspect in the north. In the preamble, we chose not to narrow it to indigenous women to make sure that we captured the STEM side of it as well, but it really pivots to both STEM and indigenous communities in the far north. There the problem in particular is completion of post-secondary education.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: You mean for indigenous women specifically. Okay.

On page 2, lines 18 through 23 talk about obstacles in that women are not being recognized for their prior work when they come here as newcomers.

Is there data showing that newcomer men have better access than newcomer women do? Is that what you were getting at?

Mr. Sven Spengemann: No, it's not.

Thank you for that question; it's very important. We didn't want to line this up as always a disparity vis-à-vis men.

Yes, the discussion is about inequality, but these are simply net obstacles that Canadian women immigrants face when it comes to the professions. We recognize that this is a provincial problem in many respects, because these accrediting bodies are self-regulatory, but the obstacle exists, and we're reaching out broadly to Canadians, so we did want to include it in the preamble.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Okay.

On page 2, lines 27 to 30, it states:

Whereas Canadian women are underrepresented as participants and leaders in sports and physical activities, which affects their health and sense of social inclusion

I recognize that this can be a barrier many times in the choices of young girls, but how does this under-representation of women in sports and physical activities affect the health and social inclusion of women? Can you give me a little bit more insight on that, please?

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Yes. What you're pointing to came in part from the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity. Leadership positions in sport are an issue in particular, and we can certainly provide the information that we received from that organization.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Can you also show data, because I think we have seen such an increase in women's participation, whether it's our World Cup soccer teams or all of those things? We've seen a huge increase women's participation in sport. I know that we have seen greater access for women when it comes to opportunities for them to take part in NCAA sports as well.

We have many Canadian athletes who are going down to the United States to play sports because of the fact that you don't get the same granting as you do in Canada. There are things there....

I am just trying to look at the data. Maybe it's because my family is so focused on sports that I see we don't have those issues.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: I appreciate that, and we all recognize the tremendous outcomes and achievements by our Canadian women athletes. There's no question about that.

Going back to Mr. Fraser's comment, there is a rural/urban divide in access to sport. There's also a poverty-related gap that may be specifically disproportionate for women who are heads of single-parent households, and I think ensuring that young girls in those households have full access is part of the issue there, but we'll certainly provide clarification.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That would be wonderful.

If you don't mind, I wouldn't mind going back to page 1, lines 19 through 23.

I'm just looking at lines 19 through 23 and comparing them to lines 15 through 23. You have those intersecting.

I could see these two being more merged in the preamble. Could you tell me why those two thoughts are separated?

Mr. Sven Spengemann: You mean with respect to poverty and inequality?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: "Whereas poverty and inequality disproportionately..." Yes, you have that section—

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Yes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: —and then it continues on about the sexual orientation that's already being discussed in the transgender.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: That's a fair point. That second preambular paragraph starting in line 19 really goes to social isolation and vulnerability, rather than just poverty and economic inequality. They're two separate issues, in our mind.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: As I said, I would be supporting this, but at the end of the day, we have the International Day of the Girl Child and a variety of different initiatives that we put forward not only in opposition but as this government as well.

Would you mind sharing what sort of an impact you think this week will actually have?

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Absolutely, and thank you for that question. That's a question that's pervasive throughout the discussion.

There are two things.

First, this is not a celebratory bill. It was initially mischaracterized by some as being celebratory. It's not a bill in which we hold up achievements of Canadian women, although we recognize them, and you'll find some of that language in the bill.

The primary aspiration of this bill is to call the problem what it is to be really frank and upfront with respect to the challenges, even to the point of being crass. That's quite intentional. Through that approach, I think it's something that the bill will do. Other celebratory days, like International Women's Day or International Day of the Girl Child, which are more celebratory in nature, will not accomplish this.

Second, through what you could call a fairly provocative approach, it seeks to engage all Canadians.

●(0910)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you.

The Chair: Now we'll go to my colleague Ms. Malcolmson for seven minutes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thanks, Chair.

Thanks, Mr. Spengemann, for the bill. I appreciated your caveat that this isn't meant to be celebratory. However, there's nothing in the bill that says that.

I'm going to propose to the committee that we call this "gender equality action week". I'd be interested to know if your focus is actually on taking action, so I'd be interested to know whether that's something you would consider.

In your introduction, you said that governments "cannot do this work alone". That is true. I would argue that the front-line organizations in the women's movement, especially during the Conservative decade in power, really carried the work of gender equality. We're also recognizing an enormous hole in federal government action.

I think you were in the House when I gave my speech. You know that I supported your bill at second reading. I'm discouraged, though, that despite the very stark list in the preamble, where you ring this huge alarm on all kinds of issues facing women—the cost of violence to the economy, the continued pay gap, the lack of pay for child care, the violence for indigenous women, and on and on and on—the remedy is so minute.

I'd like to ask why you didn't take a more prescriptive approach. We had a motion in the House a year ago to implement proactive pay equity legislation. The committee recommended that the government table that legislation this coming June. We've had the government say late 2018.

What's your view on the implementation of pay equity legislation as a way to take federal leadership on gender equality, and what should the timeline be, in your view?

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Ms. Malcolmson, thank you very much. There are a number of questions embedded in what you've said. Thank you for your advocacy, for your championship, and also for supporting the bill at first and second reading. I'm grateful.

Should it be gender equality action week? Let me take that question first.

Ideally, at the outcome of each annual gender equality week, there will be a set of actions, actionable items, or even real progress that can be identified. It is action as much as it is awareness. It's reaching out to all Canadians. It's going all the way to the elementary school level, if not even earlier, and saying to Canadians, "Here are some issues." The soft message is that unless Canadians get engaged, we will have a problem legislating our way to success.

I was hoping to give the public some levers to put pressure on us through the pathway of raising awareness and through the pathway of identifying solutions. I would like to see nothing further than communities getting engaged on the issue on pay equity—to have some marches, to have some protests even, and to have some academic works that underscore, with additional data as needed, just how profound the gaps are and also, as we saw on the economic side, how significant the opportunities are if we make actual progress.

You'll appreciate that this is a private member's bill. It's not something that will have financial implications, nor would I purport to speak for the government, which has its own executive programs and agenda.

With respect to pay equity, I absolutely see it as a human right. I think progress on pay equity will be extremely welcome, and I think the government is in the process of working on the issue. I mean, how could we not champion it?

What I'm seeking to do through this private member's initiative is to make sure that across the country we have greater awareness on the pay equity gap, on the opportunities, and through that basically generate fertile ground for government action to connect with Canadians and to solve this issue fully, rather than just—

• (0915)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you. I would argue that the public has had lots of opportunity to protest for pay equity. It's been 40 years, and we would really rather see the government lead on this

so that the front-line organizations do not have to spend their time away from their clients in protesting.

You flagged the low rate of women who are elected to Parliament, at just 26% this year, even though women make up more than 50% of the population. My colleague Kennedy Stewart brought in a private member's bill, a remedy that was intended to create incentives for political parties to get more women on the ballot. I'd like to know how you voted on that bill, which would have provided a tool to bring more gender balance to Parliament.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: I'm not somebody who's in favour of quotas, either at the party level or nationally. I've worked in jurisdictions with the United Nations.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: With respect, it wasn't a quota bill.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Well, it's legislating outcomes, basically, prescribing outcomes in terms of...

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: You know that's not what it said.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: That's something I don't favour. What I favour, and it's reflected in this initiative, is that we really empower men to step to the side of women so that we get more women not just on the ballot as an outcome, but more women wanting to run and being able to run. For that there are initiatives. The Scottish government, for example, has put forward an initiative to make sure that men have the ability or will to enter into early childhood primary caregiving roles much more easily than they do at the moment. This empowers women to actually step forward and seek political office, not because we need more women in Parliament but because they want to be on the ballot, they want to serve, and they want to have the opportunity.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: And do you believe that—

Mr. Sven Spengemann: It's more of a bottom-up approach.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson:—your bill gives that opportunity to women more than the private member's bill that my colleague brought forward, which would have given parties incentives to nominate more women for the voters to choose from?

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Again, my approach is a bottom-up approach. It is society empowering women to take that step, rather than having parties saying they will have more women on their slate. The top-down approach has to be met by a bottom-up approach to actually empower women—not just empower them, but actually make them want to run, not because the party calls them and says, "We'd really like you to, and there's nobody else and please run", but because they feel this is the right thing to do and they should be enabled to serve when they want to. I think those two approaches have to meet.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: This committee recommended gender-based analysis legislation be tabled in Parliament by this coming June. The government has said now they're not sure at all when or if that will happen—certainly not this year. What's your view on legislating gender-based analysis as an action to get gender equality?

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Look, I'm proud of what the government's done so far. I'm very proud that my office, all six of us, have completed gender-based analysis training. We continue to advocate for it. It's absolutely critical that policy outcomes reflect gender-based analysis. Anybody who looks at this program, at this particular training course, will consider it to be a no-brainer.

I can't speak for the government in terms of timelines of legislating it, but, again, my point in with this entire initiative is that we cannot legislate ourselves to success unless we have broad public awareness, and in some cases, quite willingly invite more public pressure than we've had in the past.

The Chair: Excellent. Well, wonderful.

Now we turn to our clause-by-clause review. Because we have a number of committee members who are new and who may be going through it for the first time, I will make a few comments to instruct you.

For those of you who didn't read the 1,200-page Standing Orders book and have it committed to memory, when we do a clause-by-clause review, it's important to note that unless substantive changes are made to the clause, you cannot edit the preamble or the short title. Pursuant to Standing Order 71(1), we will leave the preamble until we see whether or not there are any changes to the clauses, and similarly for the short title as well.

I would invite the representatives from Status of Women to join us. We have Nanci-Jean Waugh and Pamela Murphy. As we go along, if questions arise that they can give input to, that input would be appreciated.

The first amendment that we will consider is LIB-1. You do have a package.

Go ahead, Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): I have a question for you. My understanding is that you can't amend the bill by adding clauses that are not fundamentally part of what the House has already passed.

The Chair: That is true; you cannot do that. As well, if you have amendments that are brought in for a specific clause and there is more than one amendment that is submitted, they are addressed in the order they come in. Therefore, if the first one that you consider is moved and accepted, then you can't consider the others. You'll see there are some rules like that as we go through.

● (0920)

Ms. Pam Damoff: But in terms of adding additional clauses to the bill, they can't change the fundamental—

The Chair: They can't change the fundamental scope of the bill.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay.

(On clause 2)

The Chair: Amendment LIB-1 in your package was moved by Monsieur Serré. It reads:

Throughout Canada, in each and every year, the fourth week in September is to be known as "Gender Equality

Monsieur Serré, do you have some comments?

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Essentially, in October there is currently a celebration of Women's History Month in Canada, which also includes International Day of the Girl Child. So basically in the proposed amendment that the chair read, we're looking at Bill C-309, in clause 2, being amended by replacing lines 17 and 18 on page 3 with the following:

Throughout Canada, in each and every year, the fourth week in September is to be known as "Gender Equality Week."

I just wanted to make that change.

The Chair: Very good. I'll just note that the LIB-1 amendment is consequential to LIB-2. If you vote on LIB-1, that vote applies also to LIB-2. LIB-2 would amend the preamble, because the preamble says the first week of October, so if you decide it's going to be the last week of September, then that would also go into the preamble.

(Amendment agreed to)

The next amendment to be considered is NDP-1. This was brought forward by Ms. Malcolmson:

Throughout Canada, in each and every year, starting in the calendar year following that in which the Government of Canada implements proactive pay equity legislation, the first

Go ahead, Ms. Malcolmson.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I brought this up in my speech in the House on the theme of having this tied to action. I referenced some input we had from the United Steelworkers. They said:

...nice to have a week dedicated to thinking about the issue, but far better for women and girls to be able to enjoy gender equality throughout the entire year because there are programs and structures in place to ensure gender equality and fight misogyny and patriarchy.

I recommend, given that the government says it's going to do this, that we tie the celebration of the week and gender equality to something to celebrate. This would make the bill come into effect once legislation has been tabled.

The Chair: According to our legislative clerk, because we adopted LIB-1 and this is then affecting the same clause, the question on NDP-1 cannot be put because it conflicts with LIB-1.

We move into NDP-2, also proposed by Ms. Malcolmson:

That Bill C-309, in Clause 2, be amended by replacing line 19 on page 3 with the following:

"Action Week".

If we do adopt this amendment, the preamble would also have to be fixed, because then the name would change there as well. That's NDP-6.

Do you have comments, Ms. Malcolmson, on NDP-2?

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: It sounds as if the sponsor of the bill is intending this bill not to be celebratory but to encourage action and to mobilize communities. I think this amendment might make this look less emblematic and lead more to actual outcomes. I reference input that I got was from Joyce Arthur, executive director of the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada, ARCC.

She says that one possible suggestion to make it more effective and less symbolic is to change it to “action for gender equality week” or “gender equality action week”.

The Chair: Is there discussion on this amendment?

Go ahead, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: When this testimony came up during Mr. Spengemann's line of questioning with Ms. Malcolmson, it seemed that it was as much about awareness as it was about specific action. One of the things I know he raised as well was some hesitancy around the fact that this is a private member's bill, and if we started prescribing that the government has to take action, it could lead to a potential requirement for spending, which would potentially open up a debate about royal recommendation. I would hate to see this bill rejected for a loose reference to spending.

For that reason, I would prefer that we remain with the current name of “gender equality week”, to avoid the potential that this motion would have unintended consequences that could cause the bill to die.

• (0925)

The Chair: Is there further discussion on the amendment?

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Fraser, I think that is highly imaginative thinking. There are lots of places where we have to be cautious about a private member's bill having financial consequences. We've seen lots of stuff come through the House and be supported by all parties that have had fewer financial implications than adding the word “action” there.

Although I support the emblematic changes that the government has made that I have lobbied for—getting women on banknotes, a gender-balanced cabinet—this government risks the tag, which it's already getting at the grassroots movement, of being all talk and no action. I would think we would all do better if we were clear that this is not only another emblematic gesture but one that also encourages and supports action at all levels.

The Chair: Is there further discussion?

Go ahead, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Aside from the potential procedural hiccup that I mentioned, I think substantively that the bill is not just about action but also about raising awareness. Ideally it would lead to action, but the testimony we heard was that the awareness piece is as important as the action. For that reason, I'd prefer that we remain with the current name.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff: It appears that Mr. Spengemann wants to say something.

The Chair: Oh, very good. Go ahead, Mr. Spengemann.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thank you, Madam Chair. I wasn't sure what the protocol was to chime in, but thank you for the opportunity.

It is action. It is awareness. However, it is not government action. This bill aims to engage Canadians.

If you look at the second-last preambular paragraph, the one that goes from the bottom of page 2 to page 3, it calls on Canadians “to mark the week with events and initiatives to address the challenges”. It's action, yes, but action on the part of Canadians less than government, because we want to stress the point that this is not something that can succeed solely through government legislation. We need Canadians to be engaged, and that's what the bill aims to achieve.

The Chair: Very good.

I will call the question, then, on the NDP-2 amendment.

(Amendment negated)

The Chair: NDP-2 is not carried, which also means that NDP-6 is not carried.

Those are all of the amendments that were brought forward that have to do with clause 2. The question before us is, shall clause 2 carry as amended by LIB-1?

(Clause 2 as amended agreed to)

The Chair: There are suggestions about a new clause. If we go to NDP-3, Ms. Malcolmson, we would amend the bill with quite a substantive clause.

Ms. Malcolmson, would you like to comment on it?

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: This is in the same vein as discussed before, to link this to action and the responsibility and the power that the federal government has but has not used.

As well, on legislated pay equity and gender-based analysis legislation, this is again about government taking the opportunity to review progress on those files and to report back to Parliament on whether there have been measurable successes. It's fitting into the theme of having something that has been measurable.

In this area, I received a note from the United Steelworkers, saying:

We would rather see concrete, effective programs on issues like pay equity, affordable universal childcare, a national action plan on violence against women, and action to end poverty and homelessness for women and children, for example.

I think the measures bring some accountability and measurability to follow in with that grassroots advice.

The Chair: Very good.

Per the legislative clerk, I see that amendment NDP-3 is inadmissible because it's beyond the scope of the bill. It's calling for action on the part of the government on something that was outside the scope of the clause. That is not admissible. We won't be voting on that one.

On amendment NDP-4, Ms. Malcolmson, do you want to make a comment?

• (0930)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you, Chair.

Here's a suggestion from West Coast LEAF:

...legislation and other actions like Bill C-309...not only do very little to address inequality in the everyday lives of women in Canada, but they also create a risk of misleading the public into thinking that the federal government is taking substantive action when they have little potential to create meaningful change.

—meaning the gender equality week.

... West Coast LEAF strongly encourages the government to take more substantive action that will create meaningful change in the lives of women.

My amendment here recommending that there be a conference with all “provincial representatives and stakeholders”...“to review issues and actions taken that are related to achieving proactive pay equity and promoting gender-based analysis legislation” again creates that transparency, that measurability, and that ongoing review of real action towards achieving gender equality.

The Chair: Per the legislative clerk, NDP-4 is also inadmissible because it's beyond the scope of the bill and the clause.

We turn then to the amendment NDP-5. It's a rewrite, I believe, of the preamble.

Ms. Malcolmson, would you like a few minutes to go through that?

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Recognize that the preamble doesn't actually change anything. The only action in the legislation is the establishment of the gender equality week. However, the list of areas in which women are not equal and where human rights have not been respected in relation to Canada's commitments internationally around gender equality is so complete that we did get some feedback from stakeholders that there are some missing pieces.

One is that women's rights are fundamental human rights. Another is that Canadians are committed to safe as well as reliable sexual and reproductive health care access, and access to abortion. Another is that Canada is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted in the United Nations General Assembly in 1979, and that the Government of Canada reiterated its commitment to implement all recommendations of the convention.

The government has committed to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted in 1995. Canada is a signatory to the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted at the UN in 1993, and the government supports the 2016 report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The second-to-last one is that the Parliament of Canada recognizes that the principles set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and in particular those in articles 21 and 22, should be enshrined in the laws of Canada. That has also been a government commitment.

Canada has long recognized the importance of women's rights and long sought to address status issues, including those addressed by the Royal Commission on the Status of Women established in 1967.

Especially on the UNDRIP commitment, the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence wrote to me, saying that the preamble definitely needs a culturally relevant, gender-based

comparative analysis to make a real difference. The legislation ought to include the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, articles 21 and 22.

I also have a letter from Joyce Arthur, executive director of the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada, who strongly recommends that an “important addition” be made to the preamble to recognize that “Canadian women and LGBT persons are still being denied their reproductive rights because of lack of access to safe and fully funded abortion in their own communities, and inadequate access to other sexual and reproductive health care and information.”

In summary, I'll say that you can't have it both ways. Either we say that the preamble is something we're really proud of in the way that it categorizes the problems and leave some of these important partners and segments of our community that have suffered from gender inequality—not have an exhaustive list—or we say that the preamble doesn't matter so much. Let's either make the list complete or else recognize that the only power in this bill is, in fact, in the one paragraph around the establishment of gender equality week.

• (0935)

The Chair: As you said, because there is no change to the substantive part of the bill, which is the clause, this change to the preamble is inadmissible.

We will move to CPC-1.

Mrs. Vecchio, go ahead.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I want to look at the lines. Let's look at “by replacing lines 26 and 27 on page 1 with the following”. What we have is specifically “social support programs and child care services”. I would like to see that made broader by removing the terms “programs” and “services”, so it would read

families to affordable housing, social support and child care, as well as by gaps in Canada's health care

Just take out the words “services” and “programs” to make it a broader statement.

The Chair: Similarly to the previous one, because there were no substantive amendments to the clause, the preamble cannot be amended, so that is also inadmissible.

LIB-2 was previously.... Oh, you're not finished. I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: There are two more.

With respect to what Sven brought forward, turning to page 2, we're looking at the section that says, “Whereas Canadian women who are physically, verbally and emotionally abused often face challenges”. That's lines 5 through 7. Once again, this amendment would remove the word “programs” after the words “access to social support”, keeping it broader.

The Chair: You can finish all of them, and then we'll—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Okay.

Finally, when we're looking at... Sven, you brought this up specifically. It's the part that says "Whereas Canadian women face barriers in pursuing and completing post-secondary education".

When it is specifically related to indigenous women, I can support it, but if we go down to lines 14, 15, 16, and 17, we do specifically indicate indigenous women there, so there is a replication of thought.

I'd like to see the lines 8 through 12 read as, "Whereas Canadian women face barriers in pursuing careers in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics;"

This amendment would remove the portion after "barriers in" and removing "pursuing and completing post-secondary education", because I don't think that is correct, and the next paragraph talks specifically about indigenous women.

The Chair: All right.

As I was saying, because there was no substantive change to the clause, this preamble amendment is inadmissible.

LIB-2 was already voted on. When we said we were going to change gender equality week to the fourth week of September, the preamble is also modified to reflect that, and so that was carried.

We go now to the overall preamble.

Shall the preamble carry, as amended by LIB-2?

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Sorry—

The Chair: We're voting on the preamble as amended with LIB-2.

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

The Chair: In terms of the short title, there is NDP-6 that was consequential to NDP-2 to change the name to gender equality

action week, which we previously voted on, so that one is not passing.

Shall the short title carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the title carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the bill carry, as amended?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall I report the bill as amended to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the committee order a reprint of the bill to put the amendments in?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: That concludes the review.

Congratulations to you, Mr. Spengemann.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you to the committee. I hope your first experience with bill review was delightful.

We shall suspend momentarily so we can go in camera and continue to consider our report, since we have some time to do that.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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