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Tuesday, November 17, 2009

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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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

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• (1530)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

[Translation]

This is the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, meeting no. 56, and the date is Tuesday, November 17, 2009.

On our agenda, we have Bill C-304, An Act to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for Canadians.

Do you have anything to add, Mr. Kennedy?

[English]

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): *Merci, madame la présidente.*

I have a proposal that we defer, and I believe it is with the consent and agreement of the sponsor of the discussion.

The motion would be, if the committee is not travelling, to defer the clause-by-clause discussion to November 24, and if travelling, to December 1. The reason for this is that currently among various parties, including our own, there are new amendments coming forward that would help strengthen the bill. We would hope for the time to have some discussions on these before bringing them in front of the committee. I understand there are some of those from other parties as well. This would allow the bill to get a fuller consideration.

Some of these amendments come from some of the groups the committee heard from. They only came in yesterday and so weren't able to be fully understood, and not all of them are in the format for amending the bill.

For those reasons, I'd like to move to defer discussion to either of the two dates mentioned, depending on the committee's travel agenda.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I'd like to hear other members of the committee on this motion.

Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): First of all, there's the question of whether you're prepared to entertain the motion as being appropriate.

Second, it would seem to me that we had the sponsor of the bill speak with respect to the bill fairly adequately. There was a round of questioning, which the member participated in, and we had a full round of discussions about some of the issues relating to the bill. There were a number of them—there is no doubt about that—that were problematic and of concern. The sponsor of the bill and the seconder, I understand, introduced a number of specific amendments that were circulated amongst the committee. We've heard from various witnesses about what they may have had or not had in mind. We have concluded as a committee, insofar as the calling of witnesses was concerned, that this was sufficient. The sponsor of the bill had a lot of input as to who might or might not be called and testified herself.

That being said, there is no need for further witnesses. If the member wishes to further amend her bill, that's something that could be done during the course of the clause-by-clause. But the amendments that were put forth were substantive and they were extensive. I see no point or merit in delaying the bill for a further date. This member had not only days and weeks but months to hear from various parties and to decide how she may want to amend the bill.

While I would agree that the bill is flawed in many respects, both in wording and in its objects and what it hopes to achieve and how it may hope to achieve it, and is probably a bill that has fundamental problems, I don't think we should be deferring the matter. We should be proceeding with the clause-by-clause today and dealing with the bill as it stands.

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

Monsieur Lessard, s'il vous plaît.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Madam Chair, Mr. Komarnicki's remarks surprise me a great deal. He says that, even if the bill raises serious concerns, we have to deal with it immediately.

There are two things to consider. If he really feels that the bill raises serious concerns, he should look at it more carefully, and in the light of the amendments.

It is even more surprising that we have just received fifteen or so amendments. I have a hard time seeing how we are going to be able to give each of these amendments its due consideration in so little time. I am just finding out about them now; I do not know if my colleagues around this table have read them before. Unless we want to ignore the work that has been done by one of the parties, the Liberal party... We have the Bloc amendment, but not the ones from the Liberal party.

In my opinion, it is wise to postpone the clause-by-clause study, Madam Chair. It is even wiser because it will free up time so that we can...

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1535)

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

Mr. Yves Lessard: It is even wiser, Madam Chair, because one of the reasons why the committee has been asked to postpone our trip for the study on poverty is that the government wants us to study Bill C-56 as a priority. I do not think that we can do the clause-by-clause study of this bill today because I doubt that we can consider so many amendments in two hours.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Order, please. This is very difficult. I do not want to annoy anyone, but if you must talk, please keep your voice down.

Excuse me, Mr. Lessard.

Mr. Yves Lessard: No apology needed, Madam Chair. I really appreciate the care with which you are handling our work. Madam Chair, I am tempted to start my comments from the beginning.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): No, Mr. Lessard. People have heard you so far.

Mr. Yves Lessard: No. Madam Chair, you and my other colleagues have heard me, and I really appreciate that. But the members of the Conservative party have not heard me because they have been carrying on their own conversation at the same time. And they are the ones I was talking to, Madam Chair.

With your permission, Madam Chair, and with all due respect, I would just point out to them again that their view that we should study the bill clause by clause today is not appropriate because 15 amendments to the clauses of the bill have been introduced.

My colleague and I—I think that I can speak for her because she has just received them too—would like time to study them. That would make our work quicker and easier when we come back together because we will have studied each of the amendments.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): *Merci, M. Lessard.*

Mr. Martin, you are next on my list.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Thank you very much, Chair.

In the interest of the good harmony that exists in this committee in trying to get as much done as we can and accommodate people, and understanding that a significant number of important amendments have come forward with respect to Ms. Davies' bill that she wants to look at in all seriousness, we should give the necessary due consideration to her request for a deferral until a later date. It is a serious piece of public business that we're doing on that front. It isn't something she brought to the table; other parties have brought this to the table, and they have every right to.

I would suggest, in light of some of the other business that is before the committee.... I thought we would have this discussion later in the committee about getting from now to the end of the year. We have some government business that we have to do because it takes precedence. That's Bill C-56, which we start next Thursday. According to the schedule we were looking at until now, we were supposed to travel the following week to western Canada to study poverty. That's now a challenge, because understandably the government wants to see Bill C-56 through committee and back into the House before the break.

My suggestion, for others to consider, is that we do Bill C-56 on Thursday next week and sit as many meetings as we need to in order get it done; that we travel west the first week of December; and that when we come back, in that week before the break we deal with Bill C-304.

I put that on the table for people's consideration.

• (1540)

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

There are two things here, and I would like to ask Mr. Komarnicki a question before I give my colleagues the floor.

There are two parts to this motion. One is to defer, and the other is to defer to a specific date. You spoke in general terms, Mr. Komarnicki. Do you have objections to the deferment, or is it to the deferment to a particular date?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: First of all, I had objections to the deferment, but then I have heard Mr. Lessard say that 15 or more amendments have come in that we hadn't had. I've heard Mr. Martin say that he understands we want to get some government legislation through quickly—specifically Bill C-56—before the year is out. Those are issues of concern.

But if we're able to agree that we would do Bill C-56 starting this Thursday and concluding, as far as I'm concerned, on Tuesday and Thursday of the week following and report it to the House.... I don't know that we would need a third meeting, but if that were necessary, it could be arranged, and so be it. That would cancel the travel for next week and move it to December 1, which seems reasonable. After that, we could deal with this bill more fully at that point, and before we broke for the end of the session. That makes good sense.

With that understanding, I would certainly be prepared to consider a motion like this and perhaps have Mr. Kennedy withdraw his present motion, if he were so inclined. It would still achieve what he wants to achieve, basically.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I needed to have that clarified, because you didn't address it.

Mr. Kennedy, I'm sorry, you had the floor. Then it will be Mr. Lobb and then Mr. Savage.

[Translation]

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank all my colleagues for all their comments.

[English]

I am here as a visitor to the committee—as an MP, but on this specific issue. I think it may not be appropriate to have a motion on all the committee business tied to this. I hear the goodwill around the table, and it sounds to me as though there's certainly a way to have different objectives met. I just don't feel qualified, as a non-permanent member of the committee, to make sure I get that correct.

So speaking to Mr. Komarnicki, I'm glad to hear the openness, because while we may have differences, we should obviously put in our best earnest effort to improve a bill—I heard you say you had some concerns—and I think this would enable that to happen.

For the benefit of the committee members, so that they know their time is respected, let me say that the amendments came in large measure from people who participated in our hearings who didn't quite understand some of the deadlines and the necessity of members' being able to look at them in advance. This is to get the best result we can, and whether or not it's one that Mr. Komarnicki or others can support, hopefully at least we'll reflect the committee's best effort.

I'm quite happy to amend the motion I'm putting forward on deferment if it will help the committee arrive at facilitating its business. I'm just not sure I can summarize all the different considerations Mr. Komarnicki has raised today, but I would defer to the chair, perhaps, in that regard, because I think she's trying to put together the different pieces of how the committee can move forward.

I'll leave my comment at that.

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

Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Thank you, Madame Chair.

I do share Mr. Komarnicki's eagerness to deal with all these items that we're discussing here. What astounds me here is that we have a private member's bill that was first read in the House on November 5. I believe there are now close to 30 amendments to this bill. We heard from the testimony from the presenter of the bill that this was an all-inclusive bill that had been widely researched and studied, and we see here, upon a little bit of consultation from a few groups, over 10 amendments.

I'm astounded that on November 5 it was first read, and there are 17 amendments, what is it, a year later? It's a long time anyway, and we're just dealing with this now. So it's just astounding to me.

• (1545)

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

Mr. Savage.

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

I'm largely in concurrence with what people are saying around the table in terms of this motion and the deferment of it to a more suitable time. I want to remind the committee that we also have a motion to deal with that is very important and very time-sensitive regarding the twentieth anniversary of the unanimous declaration of Parliament, which I think we have to get to today and come to some resolution on. In light of the report that came out today about food banks and the increased necessity of food banks, poverty is a huge issue in this country, particularly among children. As parliamentarians, we all have to address this, and I want to make sure we get to that today.

I'm prepared to deal, as Mr. Komarnicki was suggesting, with Bill C-56 expeditiously. I wasn't keen on the whole way it has been handled. Mr. Komarnicki does his job well as a parliamentary secretary and normally keeps us very much in the loop, but I hadn't heard anything in terms of moving the travel. It would seem to me that it would make a lot more sense to keep that travel, which I assume is largely booked, and use next week to get witnesses lined up for the following week. Then we could be assured that we would pass Bill C-56 through the committee on, say, December 3 or 4.

I'm prepared to have this discussion, but I do want to remind committee members that we have a very important motion on the floor and many people in Canada are interested in the outcome of that.

Thank you.

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

Let me recapitulate Mr. Komarnicki's suggestion. It is a suggestion.

If I understood correctly—and correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Komarnicki—you suggested that this Thursday, November 19, followed by November 24 and 26, which is next Tuesday and next Thursday, we continue and finish Bill C-56 and report it back to the House, which would allow us to go on the trip north in the first week of December, being November 30, December 1, and so on. We would come back and we would then work on Bill C-304 and finish that before December 11, the last day of the session this year.

Is that what you're suggesting, Mr. Komarnicki?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Yes.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I'd like to hear some feedback, some reactions to Mr. Komarnicki's suggestion. It's only a suggestion. We're just discussing it in a friendly manner.

Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: As I say, I'm not going to object to that general schedule. This is the committee that has been asked to look at Bill C-56, and all parties in the House have indicated general support for the bill. It's a significantly technical piece of legislation that affects a number of departments. I have a motion before this committee that we have a joint meeting with the Standing Committee on the Status of Women who've done a lot of work in this regard. I'm prepared to accelerate the meeting schedule to get as many meetings in as we can by the end of next week. However, we cannot as a committee honestly prejudge the result of those hearings.

I'll do everything I can to push us along. We are generally in support of the employment insurance extension of maternal, parental, and sickness benefits. We've talked about that for many years. I spent part of my summer talking about it with the minister. We have to accept the fact that there may be some reasons that we would have to either have more hearings or more work in terms of amendments, but I'm prepared to accept the fact that we'll do everything we can to get it through this committee by the end of next week.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Are you talking about Bill C-56 or Bill C-304 when you say you'll do everything you can?

Mr. Michael Savage: Bill C-56.

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

Mr. Cannan.

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

I wanted to clarify, through the clerk, how flexible we are with our travel schedule. Have we made any commitments? We have a chartered plane. Are there any costs incurred to cancel or change our flight? Or is there some flexibility in putting it off?

• (1550)

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Georges Etoka): Nothing has been signed yet, because we need the House authorization to travel. We have tentatively booked hotels and stuff, but nothing has been signed, so we are not on the hook if we cancel.

Mr. Ron Cannan: The committee's responsibility, obviously, is to get Bill C-56 legislation addressed as soon as possible. Considering Mr. Savage's comments and in light of the Christmas scheduling and different activities on the Hill, is it possible we could defer the travel to January, when we return?

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

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): I've sat quietly listening. I understand the importance of Bill C-56. There's no question about the need to do a good job on that bill, because many of us—the Standing Committee on the Status of Women when I was on it, and of course our own Liberal women's caucus—have been supportive of extending EI to the self-employed for the purposes for which it does.... I think we need the time to give it the right attention, as Mr. Savage said.

But having said that, I really would encourage the committee not to postpone the travel until the next year. I think we need to finish it by early December and then allow for the researchers to begin to write something. Otherwise what we're saying is that poverty is

really always on the back burner, it's really not an issue, and we really aren't interested. We can just put it aside every time something else comes up. It's not that the other things aren't important, but this is the overarching huge something else that would influence or impact on the changes to EI, or impact on housing. It's really the kind of piece of work that impacts on all of this other stuff that we're now doing in pieces.

I would encourage us to not put it off and to finish it the first week of December and be able to give direction to the researchers to actually then draft a report.

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

Mr. Cannan.

Mr. Ron Cannan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

In response, I understand poverty is a very important piece of the issue we're dealing with, but the legislation is front and centre. We were dealing with the issue of poverty in this committee even in the previous session, so it's been going for a long time. We have the travel. We won't be wrapping up the report until we get back into the new year anyhow, so I'd be prepared to come back even before the House convenes at the end of January. We could travel the week before, the week of January 18. I'd be willing to go back and travel before Parliament resumes.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I'd like to bring to your attention, Mr. Cannan, the fact that the Liberal members of this committee will be at caucus in that week, so we are not available.

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: The NDP members will be in caucus that week as well. January is a difficult month to find time. People are doing caucus work and constituency work, and some of us are spending time with family.

I would like to see us do what Mr. Komarnicki has suggested, and I want to hear a bit more, maybe, from Mike on this. But I want to maybe put a motion on the table so that we can deal with it, that we defer the study of Bill C-304 until we come back from our western travel, that we deal with Bill C-56 Thursday of this week and next week—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): That would make it November 19, 24, and 26.

Mr. Tony Martin: Yes, and that we have the liberty to schedule other meetings as may become necessary as we look at the work that's going to be required to meet that deadline on November 26—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): It's December 11.

Mr. Tony Martin: Sorry, November 26, next week, Thursday, November 26. And that we would travel the first week of December, and that we deal with the deferred bill when we come back on that last week before we break.

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

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I have just one point. I know I said perhaps an additional meeting on Wednesday, but I'm not sure time would permit other meetings, and I don't know that it should be "other meetings" or "another meeting", which would probably be better said, because we've already got two. Would that work?

• (1555)

Mr. Tony Martin: And another meeting if necessary.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Let the clerk finish, and then I'll read it out to you so everybody will know what we're voting on.

I'll read the motion I have in front of me: "That the study of Bill C-304 be deferred until the Committee returns from its proposed travel west and north, and that the Committee study Bill C-56 on November 19, 24, and 26 and at another meeting if needed, and resume study of Bill C-304 on December 8 and December 10, 2009."

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I should just add that we talked about having Bill C-56 reported to the House.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Yes, all right, so it's November 19, November 24, November 26, and another meeting if needed, and report it to the House by November 26.

Comments?

Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: I want to reiterate here that we don't know what's going to come out of our deliberation. I'm always very uncomfortable when a parliamentary committee says they're going to finalize their study and report back to the House. I'm entirely comfortable with saying we're going to make every effort that we can, as Liberal members, to ensure that happens. I understand that if that doesn't happen, then the travel may well not proceed. That's certainly not what we want. I think it's irresponsible for us as parliamentarians to prejudge what witnesses are going to tell us about that bill and what amendments may be required.

But I give this committee my assurance, as the critic for EI on this side, that we want to do whatever we can to get this back into the House. With that caveat, I'm prepared to support that motion.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): From my past experience also, I think it's easier on everyone if we said that we report it back on November 27, which is a Friday. There's no problem in reporting to the House on a Friday, by the way. That would give us the chance to finish off on November 26, if that's where we are, and report the very next morning in the House of Commons.

Monsieur Lessard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I have the same concerns as Mr. Savage.

On the poverty question, when we planned our trip, of course we wanted to have finished our work first. But we also wanted to make sure that the drafters are able to enjoy the holiday season, and to do their work in January, when we will not be here. In my opinion, that

agenda is risky because it does not ensure that the trip will happen before the holidays. It also wastes the drafters' time, time that they could use doing the work we expect of them. Let us not forget the consensus we have that this work is of the highest importance.

I have to say that the parameters of Bill C-56 and Bill C-304 include elements, factors that must come into play and that must normally relieve poverty a little, if it is done well. I am not sure that we will succeed in doing good work on Bill C-56 if we rush things. That is my second argument.

That is also where I share Mr. Savage's position. We also want to hear witnesses. The people in the trenches, the self-employed, have their representatives and we must hear from them. We must also hear from experts. At very least, we must hear from the chief actuary who administers the employment insurance fund.

In the opposition, we are always concerned about costs. We do it openly, but we must get answers. The principle of getting the bill passed is not the problem. It is new and interesting; it is the first time that self-employed workers have acquired rights under the employment insurance plan. We recognize how interesting that is. So, since it is worth doing, let us make sure that we do it well. It seems that there may be people whom it is intended to include, but who are actually excluded. We should check that as well.

I still have one concern, Madam Chair. I agree with postponing our study on Bill C-304 until after our trip to the west. We certainly agree with that. But, as for the agenda, I wonder whether we should not stay with the trip next week and carefully consider Bill C-56 when we get back. That would not delay things very much, as long as we can start to study this bill on Thursday.

• (1600)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Before I ask Mr. Komarnicki the question, I would just like to remind you of something.

[English]

I'd like to remind everyone that what is in the motion here is the possibility of eight hours of discussion and witnesses: November 19, November 24, November 26, and another day if needed. That's eight hours. Or we could possibly even prolong it if that's what the members decide to do when we come to that.

So we're talking about eight hours additional on Bill C-56. However, Mr. Komarnicki, Mr. Lessard has made a suggestion. First of all, I have a motion here. I have to deal with that motion, but I'd like to remind Mr. Komarnicki that Mr. Lessard has made a suggestion that we keep the calendar as is in terms of traveling time and that we deal with Bill C-56 when we come back.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: It's not something we would be prepared to entertain, because Bill C-56 is important. It's important that we have it in the House and hopefully through both houses before we break for the year, because it has some significant timelines, including January 1, when we're not here. It's very important that we proceed expeditiously for the benefit of those who are self-employed.

Even dealing with it by way of an extra week is impinging on time and expeditiousness. Having said that, we would not want to delay it another week because of the danger posed to the bill itself, making it through both houses.

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

Mr. Michael Savage: I have a point of clarification.

Mr. Lessard's point is entirely correct, but I think it's moot. I don't know how that translates into French.

I'm going to ask my colleague Ed a question. Is it not the case that the House leader and/or the whip of the Conservatives has said that there will be no travel, and that without assurance we're not going to travel next week regardless?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I'm sorry, I didn't hear your answer.

Mr. Michael Savage: It passed Liaison Committee and it needed the assurance of the whips. I'm told that the three opposition whips were prepared to travel next week. Is that not the case?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I don't know what the situation is at the House leader's office. But I do know that Bill C-56 is a priority in front of everything else, including travel. We've been clear about that. That means travel can't commence next week. It can be delayed until the spring or later. But this bill will come in advance of that, and that's not going to change.

Mr. Michael Savage: My question, though, is this. Are you telling me that your House leader or whip have not said there will not be travel next week, regardless?

• (1605)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I'm not sure what position they've taken. They're probably meeting as we speak. I do know that certainly our whip would be aware of the fact that we want this bill through before travel.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Mr. Lessard, you have the floor, and then it will be Mr. Martin's turn.

Mr. Yves Lessard: I think we have the answer. This is saying that it is cancelled the moment one person does not want it. It was the right question.

The other question I would like to ask is about the witnesses. Are we saying that there will be no witnesses for such an important bill?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): That is not how I understand it, Mr. Lessard. Where do you get that from?

Mr. Yves Lessard: No, but there is the fact that we are having three or four meetings very closely together. There must be enough time to allow these people to come. So we have to get the list together very quickly, because we are going to have to hear the witnesses before beginning to study...

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): We can put our faith in Mr. Etoka. I think that you have already given him the list of witnesses whom you want to hear from.

Mr. Yves Lessard: It was not at all about a lack of faith in Mr. Etoka.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): You have already submitted your list. I think that almost everyone has done so. Am I mistaken, Mr. Etoka?

I am mistaken.

Mr. Yves Lessard: He did not have this...

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Anyway, we have a list to submit to Mr. Etoka, certainly, and then he will set about inviting the witnesses with his customary diligence.

Mr. Yves Lessard: The reason why we have not done that is that we still did not know when we were going to do the study.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Right.

Mr. Martin.

[English]

Mr. Tony Martin: For me anyway, I tabled the motion based on some very practical realities that are in front of us. First of all, the government wants to get Bill C-56 through committee and back into the House before any travel is made. It's as simple as that. That is what Mr. Komarnicki told me. And he can make that happen. All he has to do is talk to his whip or his House leader and we don't travel.

We know the process here. Committee can approve and the Liaison Committee can approve, but if any one of the whips decides unilaterally that travel is not going to happen, it will not happen. That happened last June when the plug was pulled on a planned trip to Ireland because the government whip decided that it wasn't going to allow that travel. That can happen anytime, and it's within the power of the government or any of us. The reality is that we're not travelling until we get Bill C-56.

The other question, then, is how committed are we and how strongly do we feel about the travel for poverty? I heard many say it's important to get the travel done so that we finish that piece of the work, so that the analysts can do their work over Christmas and be ready with their report in the early new year. I suggest that's a good plan, that it is what we need to do. We've been at this now for over two years, and it's time to bring it to some conclusion.

So when do we travel? Do we travel the first week in December or do we travel the second week in December? The first week, in my view, makes the most sense. The last week is always a pretty hairy week, for those who have been around for a while. There are things happening, there are votes, there's commotion, there's anticipation of the government falling and all that kind of stuff, and the whips tend to want us here. So I think the only week we have left in terms of travel is that first week in December.

That's why I'm making the suggestion that I have. I'm willing to make the commitment. I understand what Mr. Savage and Mr. Lessard are saying in terms of our hands being tied at this committee. I also understand what Mr. Komarnicki is saying about needing to get this done as quickly as we can, because at the end of the day it's not us who are going to be affected. We will still have our jobs, hopefully for a while longer, and we won't have to worry about EI for a little bit. But there are lots of people out there in this very difficult economy who are waiting for this to happen and be available to them. I think we owe it to them to, first of all, do a fulsome job to make sure this piece of work is the best possible coming out of here at this time. We've all seen where we've rushed bills and made mistakes and had to come back later and fix them. We don't want to be in that position again.

I'm pretty confident that if we do our work and do it in the spirit we've been working in at this committee over the last couple of years, we can actually get that done. That way, we meet all of the very significant and important requirements that have been laid out by all of us here today.

• (1610)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I'd like to add one point. Speaking of losing our jobs, that reminds me that budget time is going to come fairly quickly when we get back to the House at the end of January. With budget time, sometimes there are a number of *choses imprévues*, if I can use my own language in this.

My personal feeling on this is that it's really important for this committee to travel as quickly as possible and not wait until the new year, because that would push back this study on poverty. Every single time we have had to push it back, we have pushed it back.

Don't forget, it's not just travel; it is also travel to a part of the country that I don't recall, as far as Yukon is concerned, has ever seen our parliamentary committee, if any parliamentary committee—certainly not this one—which is why we had pushed it forward. I think it's really important. That is my personal opinion.

We have here a formula that can work if we all put our shoulders to the stone. We have a possibility of eight hours of witness time on November 19, 24, and 26, and maybe another two hours at some point. When the time comes, if we have to stay an extra hour one evening or something, I'm pretty sure most members, if not all members, would agree to that.

That's where we are. We're still on the same motion, which is that the study of Bill C-304 be deferred until the committee returns from its travel west and north, and that we deal with Bill C-56 during the week of November 19, 24, and 26, and another meeting if needed. The bill will be reported to the House by November 27.

The grammar isn't all together, but we'll work it out.

We would resume study of Bill C-304 on December 8 and 10, 2009.

That is the motion as it stands. We'll come to a vote on the motion, then.

[Translation]

I have just read Mr. Lessard's motion. It is exactly the exactly the same as the one we have been discussing for half an hour now and I am calling the question.

Mr. Yves Lessard: I would like to know when we are going to travel.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): The trip is scheduled for the first week in December, according to the chronology that reads as follows: study of Bill C-56, November 19, 24 and 26. Report Bill C-56 to the House, no later than November 27. Travel to the north and to the west, the first week in December; when we are back, study and finish the study of Bill C-304, December 8 and 10, 2009. There is the timeline. It is almost exactly the same as the one that was read at the very beginning. So I call the question once more.

(Motion agreed to.)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): We have now deferred the study of Bill C-304.

We can go directly to the motion tabled by Michael Savage on November 5.

Mr. Michael Savage: Which motion? Is that Tony's or mine?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I have the motion of November 5 here. Is there a more recent one? I have Michael Savage's name here.

This is the one dated November 5. Is that the correct one? I'll ask the clerk.

Mr. Michael Savage: Madam Chair, I would prefer to deal with Mr. Martin's motion about the 20th anniversary of the declaration, which preceded my motion in coming to the committee, which we discussed before.

• (1615)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): The clerk has not given me a copy of that motion. Just wait a few minutes until we get it all together.

Mr. Michael Savage: The last one I had was on November 5.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): You should have in front of you two sheets of paper. Both of them are on the same date—Tony Martin, November 5—but one of them is called “Tony Martin, November 5, revised by the analysts”.

Mr. Martin, do you have copies?

Mr. Tony Martin: No, I don't.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I take it, Mr. Martin, you've had a chance to read your version against the analysts' version?

Mr. Tony Martin: Yes. Do you want me to read the motion into the record, Madam Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Yes. I'm just giving everybody time. I was giving you time to make sure the version revised by the analysts was acceptable to you. That's why I stopped all proceedings.

Mr. Tony Martin: I will read into the record the one that we're going to debate. It is the motion that I had made before and that I'm making again.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Mr. Martin, I have two motions in front of me. There are two versions of the same motion, and I need to hear from you which of the two you're going to bring forward.

Mr. Tony Martin: Absolutely. Do you want me to do that now?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Please.

Mr. Tony Martin: I move that with November 24, 2009, marking the 20th anniversary of the 1989 unanimous resolution of this House to eliminate poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000, and not having achieved that goal, be it resolved that the Government of Canada, taking into consideration the committee's work in this regard, and respecting provincial and territorial jurisdiction, develop an immediate plan to eliminate poverty in Canada for all, starting with achieving a 50% reduction in poverty by 2020, and that this decision be reported to the House.

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

Could I have everyone's attention? Before we go further—

Ms. Dona Cadman (Surrey North, CPC): That's not the version revised by the analysts. That's his first one. Is that okay?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I'm getting to that.

As I said, Mr. Martin, there are two versions of the same motion. I don't know whether I'm allowed to ask this question, but I will ask anyway. Was there any reason that you read your own motion rather than the one revised by the analysts?

Mr. Tony Martin: It's because that's the one I want to have debated today. It's the one I brought before the committee the last time we spoke to this. It's what I would like to have debated today.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): It's your motion.

Mr. Tony Martin: Yes. It's my motion. That's why.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Fair enough. Well, that is the answer.

[Translation]

I would just like to point out to you that the motion before us is the one headed: "Notice of Motion, Tony Martin, M.P., November 5, 2009". It is not the one headed: "Notice of Motion, Tony Martin, M.P., November 5, 2009 revised by the analysts".

[English]

That is not the motion we will be discussing today, at the request of Mr. Martin.

Go ahead, Monsieur Lessard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Madam...

[English]

Hon. Maria Minna: I have a point of order. We would like to have the correct version. I don't have one yet.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Would you please put up your hand—

Hon. Maria Minna: I have two versions, but neither of them says what he just read.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): —if you do not have the version that is called "Notice of Motion: Tony Martin, MP, November 5, 2009"? That is the one we will be discussing.

[Translation]

Go ahead, Mr. Lessard.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Madam Chair, I invite our colleague, Mr. Martin, to reread the motion revised by the analysts. I think that it is simply an adjustment, a matter of syntax. It reflects Mr. Martin's motion well and completes it by providing the full name of the committee and so forth. I have reread both, and I feel that Mr. Martin's motion has been well reflected by the analysts except for one thing: the reduction of the poverty rate by 50% by 2020.

• (1620)

[English]

Mr. Michael Savage: I have a point of clarification, Chair.

I think what happened here is that on the Tuesday we debated this, we all bandied this around, and it was suggested that the analysts would take the work we had done and produce a motion for Thursday. We didn't get that on the Thursday. On the Thursday, this is the motion that Tony proposed, and the one revised by the analysts actually predates the one from Tony Martin. That's my understanding of what's happened here.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): My impression, Mr. Martin—and I'm reading the French version only—is that the French version is exactly the same, except for the sentence, as Mr. Lessard mentioned, that the decision be reported back to the House. It's exactly the same, but with all due respect, it's in better French. I can't speak for the English version as I haven't compared the two. However, it is your motion and you can do with it what you wish.

Mr. Tony Martin: The difference—and Ed knows this—is the 50% by 2020, which is in both the French and English version but not in the revised motion that was tabled by the clerk. The motion with the 50% by 2020 is the one I wanted to have debated here today. If you want, I can tell you why.

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

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I understand the two motions and how they got here. I think it was adequately explained. The fact of the matter is that the motion—and it is not Mr. Martin's—precisely sets out where we had reached at the last meeting and we said we would support, but otherwise we would not support it. With the addition to this motion, we would not be prepared to support it.

So we can lose the entire motion or we can take the objectionable portion out. As an offer of goodwill, I move an amendment to take out the portion that states "starting with achieving a 50% reduction in poverty by 2020".

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): You wish to omit that part.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I wish to amend the motion by omitting that part.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I would like to add, Mr. Martin, that what I said previously was wrong. The French version does mention that the report be made to the House, and so what I said was not correct.

What Mr. Komarnicki is telling us is that he cannot agree with the 50% and that he wishes it to be taken out. Once again, it's back to you, Mr. Martin, as to where you want to go on this.

Mr. Tony Martin: I think I've made my point clear and I want to hear from others.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Madame Minna and then Monsieur Savage.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: On a point of clarification, a point of order, it was an amendment to the motion that I put forward.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Oh, you've put forward the amendment.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Right.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): It's to take out, "starting with achieving a 50% reduction in poverty by 2020".

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Right.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I've given Madame Minna the right to speak, so I'll continue and then I'll come back.

Hon. Maria Minna: I was just going to say, Madam Chair, that this motion essentially is different from the very first that Mr. Martin brought in. All of us worked at it a bit, and there was some agreement. I have no problem with it the way it is.

I want to ask Mr. Komarnicki if his major issue is with respect to setting a date. I know that achieving it may not be realistic. It should be realistic, but we may not do it. This is only a motion in any case and not legislation. Setting it down might help put all our feet to the fire a little bit.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Do you want me to respond?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Are you finished, Madame Minna?

Hon. Maria Minna: Yes, I'm done. I just wanted to understand, because I don't have a problem with the motion otherwise.

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

Mr. Michael Savage: I'm not in favour of the amendment.

I understand we may not come to an agreement on this, but I think it's very important that we understand. This 50% seems like a very general thing that somebody picked out of the air, but a huge amount of work has been done on this even before this committee started to travel.

Campaign 2000 has all kinds of ideas on how we can reduce poverty. I would let members know—if they haven't seen the food banks' report that came out today—that the food banks' report has 10 specific recommendations that they think would alleviate the demand for food banks and would reduce poverty in general. Number two is to implement a federal poverty prevention and reduction strategy.

Now, that's what this committee is working on. That's what we want to travel for. That's something that Tony and I and Mr. Lessard and some others have pushed and pushed for, and that we believe in. But while we've been doing this travel, the UN Universal Periodic Review in June came back with a specific recommendation for Canada to develop a national strategy to eliminate poverty, and the government scratched it out.

We have to get some kind of serious commitment from the government quickly on reducing poverty. We're travelling. We're working at this committee to come up with a plan to reduce poverty while the Government of Canada is saying that we shouldn't have a plan to reduce poverty because it's a provincial jurisdiction. But any of the provinces that have an anti-poverty strategy are saying that we need the feds to step up. We need to have some kind of specificity in this motion that we can all agree on and carve it down and say, yes, it puts a little bit of pressure on us. It should. It puts the pressure on the Conservatives who are in now, and it will put pressure on us when we are in power later, God willing. That's what Parliament needs. We didn't react very well back in 1989, but we now have 10 years to reduce poverty by 50%.

This committee has heard from countries like Ireland and England who have made that kind of dent in child poverty and poverty in general. It can be done. I think we need to be specific about our targets and put the pressure on all of us to get something done.

• (1625)

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

Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I want to make a brief comment and remind Mr. Martin of some comments he made way back when the provincial member, Deb Matthews, was here talking about Ontario's poverty reduction strategy. I remember he discussed at great length and commented at great length about the provincial program called Breaking the Cycle. He may remember that their program was to reduce poverty in Ontario by 25% over five years. He was outraged at that, if I remember. Obviously, 50% is better than 25%. With the outrage at 25% but the acceptance at 50%, I wonder if he could comment on that and where he sees that in his motion.

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

Mr. Tony Martin: I certainly see these as two different things. With the report that will come forward from this committee, I will certainly be arguing at that point that we do everything in our power to lift everybody out of poverty as soon as we can.

Mr. Ben Lobb: That's not what the motion says, though.

Mr. Tony Martin: The motion before us today is calling on the government to achieve 50% reduction in poverty by 2020, and I'm okay with that too.

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

Madame Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: Just briefly, I don't want to get into semantics here. What's most important for our committee—this is a motion, it's not a piece of legislation—is to set the stage, the pace, the example, the mark, or what have you, and be a bit bolder than normally a piece of legislation would be. This is what we're doing here. We're trying to say that as a country we should be embarrassed about what we've done. We haven't accomplished anywhere near what we said we would do. We are making a resolve that we will try to do better and shoot for something that's positive but also realistic.

I think Mr. Lobb said that Mr. Martin wasn't happy with 25% in five years. Well, in ten years, 25% and 25% makes 50%, so it's not overly ambitious. In fact, it's a little over ten years, because we're now in 2009, so we're looking at 11 years, really, by the time we get started. Who knows?

Madam Chair, all I want to say is that as a committee we should be able to support something that is a bit directional and strong for families and children in our society. It's not terribly untoward. It's quite within reason.

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

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: I think it's important that we send a strong message to the government from this committee, given the work we're doing, that we need to be moving aggressively to reduce poverty. So to set some targets and some timelines is not a problem, particularly given that there is no plan in place right now. What you have are a number of provinces out there with strategies rolling out, who are saying to us that the reason they're setting some of these targets and timelines fairly low—and they are low, in my view—is that they don't have the resources to go higher. If the federal government were to come on board and provide the leadership that is necessary and provide the resources the federal government used to provide to provinces back when we had the Canada assistance plan, in fact we'd be able to achieve a whole lot more.

I think that for us to indicate in a motion today to the House that, after 20 years of not having achieved the goal that was set out in 1989, we want to reduce poverty by 50% by 2020 is modest, actually. I think we should be asking the government to lift everybody out of poverty as quickly as we can and to put in place a strategy, in partnership with the provinces, territories, and municipalities, to do that in fact.

But this is certainly a good start in that direction.

• (1630)

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

Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: First of all, we haven't had any specific evidence that I recall before our committee that used this specific number and gave a rational basis as to how it was arrived at or how it might be achieved within that time. With all due respect to Maria Minna, we can promise anything, but if you don't deliver, it hardly matters. This motion, without the “starting with achieving a 50% reduction in poverty by 2020” staying within the motion, asks the government to take into consideration the committee's work in this regard. And I would presume that the committee would make a report. It may well choose to put that specific number there if it has a

basis upon which to do so, but I hope there would be some evidence and some basis for it. Even then, we'd have to consider whether it's possible to meet that target.

So I stand with the amendment that would take it out.

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

Monsieur Lessard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Thank you.

We agree on setting a target. That seems to us to be the logical result of what we have done up to now. With all respect, I do not share Mr. Komarnicki's view that there is no evidence for the need to set a target. There is the fact that very close to a million people in Canada are going to food banks, and that two thirds of them are children, and that Canada still has a shortfall of 445,000 homes. I could go on. That is the evidence of poverty.

I have also heard government members recognize that more should have been done to successfully reach the objectives that we set for ourselves in 1989. We had targets back then. Is it too soon to set objectives, or should we wait for the results of the committee's work? In light of the discussions we have had, I do not think that the work of this committee will determine the objectives, because the scope of the task is well known. The consultations will have to determine which measures we must take in order to achieve those objectives.

That is why I say that there is a logical progression. At the moment we finish our work on poverty, we will have to be accountable for the objectives we have set for ourselves. If we do not, the opposite will happen; we will provide means that are so inadequate that we will not achieve our objectives. As I understand it, this approach is a little different from what was done previously.

Madam Chair, I move that we take the analysts' version, which they feel is appropriately drafted, and we include the two specific measures, the 50% reduction and the 2020 deadline. Immediately afterwards, the federal government could reduce...

• (1635)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): We cannot accept that because I already have a motion in front of me. We already have a motion before us and we must...

Mr. Yves Lessard: We have to defeat the other one first.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): We have an amendment and we have a motion. We have to deal with them first. After that, you can probably suggest whatever you want.

Mr. Yves Lessard: We have to defeat the amendment and then move to the other amendment. That is what we are going to do, Madam Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Two other people have asked to speak.

[English]

We have Mr. Vellacott and Mr. Savage. Then we will come to a vote on the amendment.

Go ahead, Mr. Vellacott.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): My intervention is simply that we have heard quite enough from every side. I'm not sure what more can be said, so I'd like to call the question, if that's permissible to the chairperson.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Mr. Savage, are you all right with that? You did ask for the floor.

Mr. Michael Savage: I will be, as soon as I've finished.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: You are always reasonable.

Mr. Michael Savage: Out of respect for Mr. Vellacott, I half agree with him.

I want to go to this idea, because it's central to the question on Mr. Komarnicki's amendment. He again is suggesting that this 50% is an unsubstantiated number. I don't think it is. I'm not sure if he was on the committee when we actually heard from officials from the U.K. and Ireland and looked at reports from other countries and other provinces. There are people who are reducing poverty by significant percentages. They did it starting in the 1990s, and they have had significant reductions.

You could call the Caledon Institute before us, and they could probably tell you what percentage of families are lifted out of poverty because of the child tax benefit. We haven't reduced poverty to the level that we should, but there have been measures in there, nuggets that have been very important to the social infrastructure of this country. We have reduced poverty among seniors because of the guaranteed income supplement combined with the OAS. There is empirical evidence that we can substantially reduce poverty, and although a part of this may be aspirational, I don't think there is anything wrong with that either.

We need to have some target that says this committee and, by extension, the House of Commons are committed. We made a statement back in 1989 and we didn't achieve those targets, but it doesn't mean that everything was wasted. It just means we have to do better, we have to do more, and perhaps we have to be more specific. That's why I support the 50%.

I also want to make another point, Madam Chair. It is that if we can't come to some agreement among us, then we should defer it. I think we should look at this next Tuesday, which is exactly the 20th anniversary of the declaration of the House of Commons. That is the time to make a decision on this; if we can't come to terms on it, then we'd look at something else, but there is no point in voting on it today if there is no consensus.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I'm sorry, Mr. Cannan, I did say that we would vote after Mr. Savage. Unless this is something you think is absolutely important to say, I would really prefer to vote on the amendment now.

Mr. Ron Cannan: I just wanted to comment on the fact that we had consensus on the analysts' amended motion from our earlier deliberations, and it didn't include the 50%; now, all of a sudden, it does. It is ironic that he changed his mind—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): We have a motion in front of us—

Mr. Michael Savage: On a point of order, Chair, I specifically said that I wasn't prepared to go with that, and that there were other

people I wanted to consult before I agreed to that weak-kneed motion.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): We have an amendment before us, which is to omit from Mr. Martin's motion the words "starting with achieving a 50% reduction in poverty by 2020". In French it would be

[*Translation*]

"...et dont le premier objectif serait de la réduire de 50 % d'ici 2020..."

[*English*]

All those in favour, please raise your hands.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): We have now before us a motion. It is Mr. Martin's motion, except for those words that have just been taken out by amendment.

Mr. Martin, do you wish to say anything on this?

Mr. Tony Martin: I'm just watching how this unfolds. I can read the writing on the wall the same as anybody else. If we move a motion to postpone the vote on this until next Tuesday, it will probably lose, because we don't have the numbers here today to have it passed. Rather than lose the motion, I would like to make a friendly amendment that I think would pass the test of consensus: "and that this decision be reported to the House on November 24".

● (1640)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Is that acceptable to everyone, without my having to go through the amendment?

Excuse me, Mr. Savage, if you have something to say, make sure everyone hears it.

Mr. Michael Savage: I'm wondering if Mr. Martin has the option to table this motion for now and not have a vote on it right now? Or does that need unanimous consent?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): There's only a problem if we're going back to the 24th or the 26th. I'd like to remind you that we did say that on those days we would be discussing Bill C-56. At this point, do we wish to take time away from Bill C-56 in order to come back to this motion? I do ask that question.

Mr. Michael Savage: I'll answer that.

If we're prepared to have all kinds of meetings next week for Bill C-56, I don't think anybody would object to 10 minutes to have a vote.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I'm bringing that up so that everybody can see what's in front of us.

Mr. Michael Savage: Let's be clear about what's happening here.

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

Mr. Michael Savage: I think I still have the floor, Madam Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): No. I don't think you do, Mr. Savage, I'm sorry. I'm going to give Mr. Cannan the floor, then Mr. Komarnicki, and then I'll come back to you.

Mr. Cannan.

Mr. Ron Cannan: Thanks, Madam Chair.

I just want to clarify. Mr. Martin was just asking that we report this to the House on November 24. Is that correct?

Mr. Tony Martin: It's the anniversary date.

Mr. Ron Cannan: That's fine.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Okay, that's fine. Is that the end of your intervention?

Mr. Ron Cannan: Yes, I just wanted to clarify that. It's no problem.

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

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I think it was a reasonable thing to do, and we're prepared to say that, or I could have withdrawn the motion altogether, which wouldn't have been helpful. I think that's fine. November 24 is a reasonable report date, and we can go along with that amendment.

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

Mr. Michael Savage: We should be clear on what's happening here in case there are people later on who follow this and don't understand how this minority Parliament works.

This is a committee that has a majority of opposition members. The chair is conveniently away, I think in Scandinavia, in a country that actually has a strong social infrastructure and is proud of it. Because of that, there is not a majority. There normally is a majority on the opposition side, which would mean that we could pass a significant bill with targets in the form of an amendment that would make a difference for people in poverty.

I am prepared to support this motion because my friend Tony, who I believe in, is comfortable with it and I think it at least does something. But I think it's too bad that we couldn't have done something with a little more teeth in it. I think we're letting people down and I feel bad about that, but I'm also not prepared to see this thing go by the wayside and not have that discussion in Parliament on November 24. I think Mr. Martin's amendment to that effect makes sense.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): If I understand this correctly, Mr. Komarnicki has indicated that he and his colleagues find the friendly add-on of November 24 as the date when it would be reported to the House is acceptable. The motion would read: "...develop an immediate plan to eliminate poverty in Canada for all, and that this decision be reported to the House on November 24."

Do we need to come to a vote on this motion? I have a suspicion that we will all agree on this.

(Motion agreed to)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): There's unanimous agreement on this motion.

Congratulations, Mr. Martin. You've waited a long time. It's not quite what you wanted, but it's part of the way there.

Thank you very much, everyone.

We now come to the other motion we have in front of us, which is Mr. Savage's motion dated November 5, 2009.

Mr. Michael Savage: I want to see a copy of that motion.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): We're just waiting for it to be circulated.

I'll ask you to read it out, Mr. Savage, so that everybody is on the same page.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you very much.

Madam Chair, I'm prepared to read the motion. I'm not quite sure why there are two. I submitted one.

• (1645)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I'd like to bring to the attention of members of the committee a slight revision. You have before you two texts, one short and one long. In fact, the motion itself is the short text, the one that is three lines long. The part that is longer is really the preamble to the motion. So what you will be voting on is, "That the Standing Committee on Human Resources" and so on, and so forth.

I'll ask Mr. Savage to read his motion and explain it.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you.

I'll read the short one: That the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities and the Standing Committee on the Status of Women hold at least one joint meeting to review Bill C-56.

Shall I speak to the motion, Madam Chair?

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

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you.

The status of women committee, of which my colleague Ms. Minna has been one of the leading members over the last number of years, has done a fair amount of work on employment insurance. This year they did a major piece of work on employment insurance and how it affects women, and they have some recommendations about the self-employed and how women should be affected by the self-employed being brought into the employment insurance system and other aspects, specifically maternal, parental, sickness, and compassionate leave.

To me it makes perfect sense that this is how Parliament should work. Where there's expertise existing on two committees looking at a single piece of legislation, we should do a meeting.... And I'm not sure how this is done. I would rely on the expertise of others. I've never done one in my time in Parliament.

Madam Chair, you've indicated that you have.

But it seems perfectly sensible that we have at least one meeting of both these two committees, and that would obviously have to happen next week.

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

Mr. Vellacott.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I would respond to the member without taking a very long time here, but the honourable member Maria Minna is on that committee.

Are you still on the committee?

Hon. Maria Minna: No, I'm not. I was when I was the critic, but I'm not now.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Okay.

Anyhow, with that kind of experience resident right in our committee here, and that kind of wisdom in response to a bill that in large part involves women, as I understand, I would think Mr. Savage would cede his chair and you could simply substitute those people in, as you choose, for part of the committee or the whole of the committee.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Let's not discuss so much how we're going to do it. Let's discuss whether we want to do it.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Precisely, Madam Chair. And that's my point. I don't think this is necessary. I think it can be done and you can accomplish the same result by having those members of the status of women committee sub in for a period of time on behalf of Mr. Savage, as they choose, for part of that two-hour meeting. So I don't see this as necessary.

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

Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I agree with Mr. Vellacott.

In the past when we did Bill C-50, it was with the immigration committee, but I subbed in to ask questions. It becomes more complex and difficult from a process point of view to have two committees, two chairs, whatever. We know that we have an allotted time for questions. We go by rounds of seven minutes and then rounds of five minutes.

There are enough members and numbers here where people from the status of women could be subbed in to ask questions on the first round or second round in a simple fashion through the committee we now have, with one chair. It's less complicated. It's straightforward. You can achieve the same thing without complicating the matter further.

So we would be opposed to the motion but not opposed to status of women people being subbed in to ask questions in the first round or second round during our hearing. It would be done in a normal fashion with the normal rules in this committee. And this committee would be the lead.

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

Madam Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: Thank you, Madam Chair.

If I read this motion correctly, I don't think Mr. Savage means for it to be while we're having the hearings. I think that subbing—me or anyone else, one or two—is obviously a doable thing.

The bigger value for this.... I wasn't part of the committee when they studied the EI part; I was no longer a member. I think what this motion is speaking to, which I like, is this. It is asking for a joint

meeting where we as a committee would discuss potential resolutions or potential impacts, or lack of, in the legislation, and so on. I think that's where the benefit would come in.

Quite frankly, I think it would be a huge assistance to us, as we discuss the bill, to see if there are any aspects of the bill that may benefit from being strengthened from the research the women have done. They had much more intense hearings and concentrated work on the issue of EI than we are going to be able to do in the short time we are taking to put the bill through, and I think it would certainly help us to have a joint meeting with the standing committee.

Asking questions of witnesses is one thing. And I understand, Mr. Komarnicki, that you're talking about time. But having a joint meeting around this table in camera where we can discuss and they can bring forward their findings, I think, is much more useful for us. And I think that's what Mr. Savage is suggesting.

• (1650)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Before we go further, there seems to be not quite an understanding as to how you see it, Mr. Savage. I'd like you to take a couple of minutes to talk to us about how you see this joint meeting to review Bill C-56. It's your motion.

Mr. Michael Savage: I'm open to different variations on that meeting. I want to make sure that we have the view of the status of women committee. Mr. Vellacott says they can sub in; well, I have a lot of questions about Bill C-56 from a regular EI point of view, some of which include how women are affected and some of which don't. I want to be here; I don't want to be subbed for. You and Madam Minna also have some specific interest in Bill C-56; you want to see it move along.

I should let the committee know that the status of women committee has a similar motion in that committee, and I think they're dealing with it today. If we can't come to an agreement, I'm going to table this motion until we see what happens at the status of women committee, but I'd like to hear what my colleagues on the opposition side think.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): This is not clear to me. Are you suggesting that this meeting, whatever shape it takes in terms of its membership, be to discuss it or to hear the witnesses or both?

Mr. Michael Savage: Yes.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): That's a possibility. Okay. I just want that to be clear to everyone.

Go ahead, Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: My sense is that if you expand the committee by doubling its size or even making it bigger than this, it will be cumbersome. It has issues and problems with chairing and so on. I still think that if the members of the status of women committee want to be present here, they certainly can be, whether subbed in or not, but those who do the questioning and who participate in debate would need to take a chair within this committee by subbing in. There are four members of the Liberal party, two members of the Bloc party, and one member of the NDP, and they can perhaps all take a chair at different times.

The fact of the matter is that it's far less complicated to proceed as we have been and accomplish pretty much all that Mr. Savage would want to accomplish for this motion. We will oppose it, but we would be prepared to work with the committee to ensure that the status of women committee is well represented within one hearing or whatever is decided.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Before we come to any vote, can we come to some kind of agreement as to the feasibility of members of both parties and of both committees being present? Then we could work out the finer details as to their presence. Obviously there's agreement on one thing and disagreement on another part. From where I sit, it seems the agreement is that we could have members of both committees present to discuss Bill C-56. Correct me if I'm wrong, but the disagreement seems to be over how the membership is going to be playing in terms of which questions go to whom and for how many minutes. That seems to me to be an important detail, but it is nonetheless a detail.

Would you agree to decide, first of all, on whether you agree to have a joint meeting, and then have a discussion on how the word "joint" could be defined? Would you agree to that?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: You can take the word "joint" out. I think we could agree that we will have a meeting at which members of both would be present within this committee. "Joint" implies two sets of people: eight Liberals, 12 Conservatives, and so on.

Mr. Michael Savage: There are three Liberals here, Ed, or four.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: In the room there were three, but—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Excuse me, you see where I'm going. I'm just trying to dismember it so that we can agree on something and then move forward to that.

[Translation]

You have something to add, Mr. Lessard.

• (1655)

Mr. Yves Lessard: If we take out the word "joint", it does not mean the same thing at all because, at the moment, each party can replace one of its members. We can do that without passing a motion. So that aspect is removed.

I like Mr. Savage's motion because I think it would be interesting to have a working session using the experience of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Through their work, members of that committee have a perspective that we perhaps would not see when we come to study Bill C-56. Let us hold a working session like that, with all of us. The problem is not deciding who will be in the chair. That is simple; we could say that it would be the chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women for an hour and our chair for the other hour. It could be like that. That is simple. We have to decide whether it would be useful, and I think it would.

Second, can it be done? Again, I think it can. Do we have to do it in our present situation? I am less sure about that. We could perhaps decide that one or two representatives of each party on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women could come to meet with us, but I am not ruling out everyone being there. But I think that we have to find out the keys to their understanding of Bill C-56.

[English]

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

Mr. Tony Martin: I think it's a good idea. I'm always up for trying new things; I assume it hasn't happened before.

I think there are some logistical questions that need to be answered around it. I agree with Mr. Savage's suggestion that we table it until Thursday. In the meantime we'll hear back from the committee on the status of women and hear what they have to say. Perhaps a couple of people could sit down and bring back to the committee on Thursday a plan that would share with us how this would work, how it would happen, and how we would make it happen. Otherwise, at the moment it's a bit confusing as to how it might unfold.

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

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I was going to say that as Maria knows, there is work from that particular status of women committee around the concept of women and with respect to self-employment, so I think that good evidence can be and ought to be brought forward with respect to our review of the bill. I don't know what in the present circumstance prevents that from occurring, because that report has been done. You were no doubt part of it at that time with respect to women and self-employment, so the very concept that this bill involves, significantly and in a major way, has been studied already, and I think the evidence brought forward would be appropriate.

There is another caution I would raise. I am correct in understanding that we have already assigned, by way of the previous passed motion, Thursday, Tuesday of next week, and Thursday of next week to a study of the bill itself, so to be getting into any amount of quibbling back and forth and wasting time when we've got witnesses before us is, I think, out of order. You can certainly table if you want, but I'm thinking you're not tabling it until this coming Thursday, or Tuesday or Thursday of next week. It's some other time, if you choose, but we've already committed in terms of what we're doing on those particular days. We don't want to be wasting half an hour or half the meeting or a big part of the meeting by going back and forth on this motion, which in effect is what would occur. We've already agreed to our work schedule for the next three successive meetings here.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you. Your point is well taken.

Go ahead, Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: We've agreed to meet next week and we can add more time if we need to. We've agreed to meet; we haven't agreed on the witnesses we're going to hear. We haven't indicated, and it hasn't been indicated to me, that this would take longer to do.

When I came up with the motion, we didn't know that Bill C-56 was going to be jammed through the committee like a sausage. We had assumed that there would be normal hearings and that some time would be taken. We're now trying to do our best to accommodate the needs of the government so that it gets into place before the end of the year.

I don't think there's anything sinister in this motion. I don't know if you're afraid of women; I'm not sure what the reason is that you don't want to do it. It's not going to take any more time and it's not going to cost any money. However, Madam Chair, if it works with the government, I am prepared to hold on to this and perhaps chat with Ed to see if we can come to an agreement.

I also want to hear what discussion has happened at the status of women committee to indicate their view of this. Perhaps we can work this out in a way that makes us all happy away from this table.

• (1700)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I'll have a suggestion to make, but first we have Madam Minna and then Mr. Keddy.

Hon. Maria Minna: I agree with Mr. Savage if he wants to discuss it later and wait for the committee, but I have a suggestion. I'm not talking about the hearings part necessarily, but we can talk about how we do it.

My sense is that it would be very helpful for this committee to sit with the members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. They have gone through all the hearings and hopefully they will have had time to read the bill. They can follow the hearings and they can give us the benefit of their experience and knowledge as to whether the bill misses the mark or misses a group of people, as well as on how it may impact on women in a way that we may not have anticipated. I think it would be helpful to have them here in the room with us to discuss the bill at some point.

The joint meeting doesn't have to be during the hearings. I wasn't on the committee when this particular piece of work was done, so I don't have first-hand knowledge of the work that was done. I've read the report, but that's not the same as having been there and having understood the stuff that's happening.

So we're going to have meetings outside of the hearings themselves, and at that point we should have a meeting with the members of the committee for the status of women in Canada so that we can actually hear them and have their input. They can share with us their concerns or what have you, if any, with respect to the bill and share suggestions they might have to improve the bill or anything of that kind. I think it's beneficial to do that, rather than to ignore it altogether.

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

Mr. Ron Cannan: Thanks.

I just wanted to clarify the fact that no, we're not afraid of women, Mr. Savage. I've got three adult daughters, and I know women rule. They remind me of that all the time around the table. They make the decisions—

Mr. Michael Savage: I apologize for that comment, Madam Chair. I do. I understand. I've got women in my family too.

Mr. Ron Cannan: I know you're joking.

I've actually substituted in on the status of women committee myself. The biggest thing is to try to get 20 people around the table, and we still only have the same amount of speaking time, so we're not really going to have extra time to ask additional questions. I know Mike said he wants to ask questions, and other people do too. I think the best thing to do is if we have somebody...we're all ex

officio; we can all sit in at the meetings. If there are any specific issues we want to discuss, we can have them come and sit in. I know Tony and his colleagues substitute all the time if there's a specific issue they want to talk to.

I think we can work this out without having to belabour the point. We can all work it out.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): We're short on time. That is the problem, Mr. Cannan.

Mr. Ron Cannan: Yes. If we have another committee meeting, we can work it out. If we want to bring extra people to the meeting, sub them in.

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

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I agree with Mr. Cannan. It seems to me there are two different issues being discussed here. We have the motion before us, and we have some discussion of tabling the motion. A motion can't be tabled without unanimous consent, so with respect, Madam Chair, I think we're ready for the question.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Before we put the question, I have two things. One, I'm going to give Mr. Vellacott the chance to speak, and two—this is only a suggestion, and I know I have a motion in front of me—I would like to ask Mr. Savage to unofficially come back to us before Thursday with a newer proposal that takes into account what has happened at the status of women committee and, given the discussion that has taken place around this table, something that is more palatable to both sides of the table so that we can move forward.

I am very worried about the fact that we have three or four meetings coming up for Bill C-56, that we all want Bill C-56 to be tabled by November 27, and we have a very short timeline on this. At the same time, we have a motion that is interesting and important, so I don't want to take time away from any future meetings to once again discuss this motion for a length of time, because it's self-defeating. We can discuss whether we want the status of women committee with us, but then if we have no time to discuss the issue, what is the point? Do you see what I mean?

I'm going to give Mr. Vellacott the floor. I would rather not go to a vote. I would rather that we ask unofficially Mr. Savage to come back to us with a new and revised motion or suggestion.

Mr. Vellacott.

• (1705)

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: In the spirit of what you've said, Madam Chair, because we've only got not quite 25 minutes here to actually decide on the program for hearings... I don't know if it's just an assumption that we're going to have the department in on Thursday, but we haven't agreed yet on who we're having in or how we're proceeding from here. We've got very little time remaining now. When we have these good people come, we don't want to be taking up time with other stuff, our private committee business. With that in mind and knowing we need to get some understanding as to this Thursday and Tuesday and Thursday of next week, I simply would affirm that we should get to the question and decide on a witness list for two days hence, right around the corner.

So I think we should move to the question, if we could, Madam Chair.

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

Am I wrong in saying that I don't think we have unanimous consent on Mr. Savage's motion as it stands before us now? Am I right in saying that we do not have a consensus?

Mr. Michael Savage: Madam Chair, on a point of order, is there unanimous consent that I can table this motion and have discussions with the parliamentary secretary and anybody else they recommend to see if we can bring back something more palatable?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Would that be acceptable to members?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I think members have been asking for the question to be called and for the motion to be defeated, but in fairness to Mr. Savage, I think we should call the question, defeat the motion, but he and I should have discussions on how the process can accommodate in good measure what he would like to see and what we would like to see, to have some form of order and neat process to effect the smooth process of the meeting.

With that, I think we should call the question.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I will call the question.

This is what I think is going to happen.

[Translation]

I am going to call the question. If the vote for Mr. Savage's motion is not unanimous and if the motion is defeated, there will then be an informal meeting between Mr. Savage, Mr. Komarnicki and anyone else who wants to attend to discuss how we can study Bill C-56 unofficially by inviting the members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

I call the question on Mr. Savage's motion.

(Motion negated).

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): The next step is for those two gentlemen—and anyone else who wants to join us, as I take it the meeting is an open one—to get together after 5:30 and make some kind of proposition so that we can move forward.

It's my feeling that everybody wants to have members from both committees present, but we don't quite know how, so we'll let them thrash it out between the two of them and come back to us with a suggestion.

We have 20 minutes left. I'd like to discuss how we are going to tackle the three or possibly four days that remain to us for Bill C-56. I've been away for a little while, so I'm not altogether sure. I'd like to hear from the clerk exactly where we are and what he suggests to us.

The Clerk: On Thursday we have the minister for one hour. The second hour will be with the officials of the department. I've already received a number of names that have been called to be witnesses for next Tuesday, since the committee is not travelling. That was tentative. Then, as the chair said, we'll hopefully be receiving names from the members for the next witnesses.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Then do we have enough witnesses for next Tuesday?

The Clerk: Correct.

• (1710)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): This Thursday is okay in terms of the minister and the officials. Next Tuesday is okay in terms of witnesses. We are now awaiting names of possible witnesses from you. Please get them in as quickly as possible, so that the clerk can get in touch with them and invite them for next Thursday's meeting.

What do we do about this fourth date? Where to put it is always a big problem. Do you want to discuss the possible fourth date now, or do you want to leave it until next Thursday or next Tuesday? It can't just happen on the spur of the moment. You know how it works.

Go ahead, Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: It seems to me we'd have a better idea of that on Thursday. I don't think we knew that we'd be doing Bill C-56 as quickly as we are. I wasn't aware the minister was even confirmed for Thursday until yesterday. I think we should see where we are, make sure we get the witnesses in over the next couple of days, and make a decision on that on Thursday.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): That's this coming Thursday, the day after tomorrow.

Be prepared to come with some kind of agenda next Thursday so that we can look at that fourth meeting. If we do need it, we can then put on the agenda the time and place and the witnesses we want to hear at that time.

Are there any other questions arising from the proceedings?

[Translation]

Are there any further questions or comments?

[English]

Thank you. The meeting is adjourned.

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