



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

FEWO



NUMBER 031



1st SESSION



39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Wednesday, December 13, 2006



Chair

The Honourable Judy Sgro

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

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• (1540)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.)): I call to order the 31st meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. We are continuing with our public hearings on cuts and changes to the mandate of the Status of Women Canada, as directed by the committee.

We have four groups with us today: the Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale, represented by Mariette Gilbert; Collectif Féminisme et Démocratie, represented by Jackie Steele; Regroupement provincial des maisons d'hébergement et de transition pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, represented by Louise Riendeau; and the YWCA, represented by Paulette Senior.

We welcome you. You have five minutes maximum. Given time constraints, the buzzer will go off at four minutes and I will raise my hand to indicate that you have one minute left. We always want to ensure that committee members have adequate time for their questions as we proceed, so I will be keeping everybody close to the five minutes so that everyone has that opportunity.

We will start off with the Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale. Mariette Gilbert, would you like to lead off?

[Translation]

Ms. Mariette Gilbert (President, Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale): Madame Chair, members of the Committee, I want to thank you for giving us an opportunity to address this issue as part of your current consultations.

AFEAS is here to discuss the impact of its action and that of women's groups on gender equality, as well as the importance of maintaining and strengthening the mandate of Status of Women Canada and its funding, so that Canadian women will one day attain real equality.

A non-profit organization founded in 1966, AFEAS represents 13,000 Quebec women who work on a volunteer basis for 300 local groups in 12 regions. Founded on the values of peace, equality, fairness, justice and respect, AFEAS seeks equality in law and in fact for Canadian women, along with their complete independence, so that they can participate fully in democratic life in Canada and Quebec, at all levels.

Over its 40 years of existence, AFEAS has helped women in Quebec and Canada to become integrated into various sectors that were previously inaccessible. Let me give you some examples.

The work carried out by AFEAS has resulted in the recognition of unpaid, so-called « invisible » work by women in Canadian statistics, through the five-year censuses. We should also mention that women working in a family business now have the status of paid workers, as well as the integration of women in the political arena and in various decision-making positions.

These advances for women, and many others, were made possible by the enormous amount of work performed by AFEAS members in partnership with women's groups in Quebec, Canada and throughout the world. The significance of AFEAS's actions was underlined on November 29, 2006 before Quebec's National Assembly.

It's important to remember that on December 10, 1981, Canada ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, known as CEDAW. In 2003, the UN CEDAW Committee recommended that Canada redouble its efforts to achieve wage parity, fund a national daycare services program, enhance the Court Challenges Program, and consult with women's groups demanding equality.

However, in September 2006, the federal government eliminated the central objective of Status of Women Canada: that of working toward gender equality in Canada. Moreover, it banned the use of Women's Program funds for activities aimed at promoting equal rights for women and influencing all levels of government. At the same time, it slashed SWC's operating budget by 40 per cent, beginning on April 1, 2007.

As set out in its original mandate, Status of Women Canada played a key role until last September, in the achievement of gender equality in Canada. Today, the mandate of SWC is, and I quote "to facilitate women's participation in Canadian society by addressing their economic, social and cultural situation through Canadian organizations". What this means is that the goal of achieving equality has now been scrapped and policy research has been discontinued. Funding will be available to for-profit as well as not-for-profit agencies. But how will Status of Women Canada be able to play an effective role with an annual operating budget of only \$7 million, four offices and 50% of its staff?

With regard to gender-based analysis, which requires coordination and expertise, who will ensure its implementation and follow-up, given that the staff has been halved?

AFEAS is of the view that the changes in SWC's mandate and these budget cuts cannot be justified by any valid argument, especially since there is still an enormous amount of work to be done, particularly within the government itself, as evidenced by the 2005-2006 Departmental Performance Report from Status of Women Canada, which states the following:

However, because Canada's report shows very little gender-based data, it is difficult to clearly identify the progress of women across the government's work.

In conclusion, even though legal equality for women is taken for granted in Canada, *de facto* equality has still not yet been achieved in many different areas, such as paid work and unpaid work, family, violence, health, and so on. Indeed the Minister responsible for Families, Seniors and the Status of Women in Quebec has acknowledged that fact and will be tabling Quebec's policy on gender equality and an action plan in the coming days.

• (1545)

For all of these reasons, the membership of AFEAS, who want to live in an egalitarian society, find the change in mandate and the budget cuts to Status of Women Canada unacceptable. This government's decision is a violation of its commitments towards women and runs counter to specific terms of CEDAW. That is why AFEAS is asking the current government to immediately reinstate the mandate of Status of Women Canada and the funding guidelines in effect prior to September 26, and that it immediately cancel the \$5 million budget cut.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Gilbert.

Next we have Jackie Steele from the Collectif Féminisme et Démocratie.

Jackie.

[Translation]

Ms. Jackie Steele (Spokesperson, Federal Representation, Collectif Féminisme et Démocratie): Madam Chair, ladies and gentlemen members of the Committee, I would like to thank you for agreeing to hear from the Collectif Féminisme et Démocratie as you pursue your Committee work.

The Collectif was created in 2002 to intervene in favour of reforming democratic institutions in Quebec and achieving equal representation of women and men in political bodies. We are now comprised of a network of roughly 1,000 women, predominantly in Quebec.

First and foremost, we wish to convey our profound opposition to the recent decisions of the current Government of Canada, decisions that offend us to the core. First, the closing of 12 of the 16 regional offices of Status of Women Canada for us means that decisions will be centralized, for the most part, in Ottawa. Next, the support granted women's groups will now essentially be mediated via the Internet, whereas in the past, groups could count on the expertise and technical assistance of staff on the ground locally, as has been our experience over the past four years.

In addition, the removal of the objective of achieving equality from the mandate of Status of Women Canada is an unacceptable step backwards that is inconsistent with the democratic principles

laid out in both the Canadian Constitution and the Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Finally, the new eligibility criteria for funding under the Women's Program reflect a troubling contempt for women's political participation and deny the close connection between advocacy for women's rights and women's ability to fully participate in the country's economic, social and cultural life.

According to the Minister responsible, the Honourable Bev Oda, equality is now a reality simply because it is enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. If equality is a reality, how is it that only 31% of members of the Quebec National Assembly are women — which is actually the highest percentage in all of Canada. As far as we are concerned, however, that is not enough. Furthermore, only 20% of members in the House of Commons are women, and a meagre 11% of the Conservative caucus are women. If equality exists in the letter of the law, we must nevertheless admit that equality is far from having been achieved in practice. That is true in the case of political power, just as it is for pay equity, violence against women, and I could go on and on.

According to the Collectif Féminisme et Démocratie, in order to achieve genuine equality, we need a clear expression of political will at all levels: local, regional, in Quebec and federally, and on multiple fronts: in other words, the creation of direct services, education, coordination, research, consultation with a wide diversity of women and, of course, the passage of progressive legislation and public policies.

It is worth remembering that it was only in 1929 that women officially became "persons" before the law, and this, as a result of a costly legal challenge that had to be taken all the way to London before it could be won. The abolition of the Court Challenges Program and the dismantling of the Law Commission of Canada are clear manifestations of an unprecedented authoritarianism that will handicap our democracy in Canada and Quebec. It is evident that we have not eliminated the legacy of 200 years of discriminatory laws towards women, which continue to have harmful effects in 2006, as well as resulting in systemic discriminatory practices.

If the problem is systemic, collective responses must also be systemic. For there to be more women in government, we cannot rely solely on strategies that focus on direct and individual interventions with candidates. From the moment a principle, such as equality, is affirmed by society, government action is both necessary and legitimate, in order to ensure that equality is respected and realized. That means taking collective measures, such as passing legislation and introducing incentives, in order to achieve equal representation of women and men, with every election.

The fact is that over 100 countries worldwide have adopted these kinds of positive measures. Equal sharing of power between women and men is an indisputable cornerstone of modern democracy, which recognizes the effective right of women to govern. We also believe that this sharing of power between women and men is a prerequisite for the adoption of laws and public policies that fully address the needs and realities of a wide diversity of women and men.

It is in that spirit that the Collectif Féminisme et Démocratie engages in political representation in Quebec, at the federal level, and internationally, to strengthen democracy. In Quebec, since 2003, the Collectif educated over 2,000 individuals, primarily women, with respect to the linkages between democratic issues, the voting system, affirmative action and political representation of women. That work has been carried out alongside a myriad of efforts, including awareness-raising among civil society groups, the production of informational tools, organizing events to promote debate within Quebec society, representations to political parties and to the Government of Quebec. It is this kind of action strategy, developed in close collaboration with a variety of partners, that has enabled us to advance the rights of women in Quebec.

• (1550)

According to the new funding criteria for the WP, or Women's Program, these kinds of activities are no longer valued by the current Government of Canada.

For its part, the Government of Quebec announced this morning that it intends to advance to cause of equality in Quebec by including, in its new elections legislation, a provision for male-female alternation on proportional representation lists, and making this mandatory for all political parties. However, within this parliamentary arena, it is obvious that there is still much work ahead, as we pave the way forward on the road to equality.

Thank you for your attention.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Steele.

Madame Louise Riendeau is next.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Riendeau (Coordinator of Political Files, Regroupement provincial des maisons d'hébergement et de transition pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale): Madam Chair, ladies and gentlemen members of the Committee, thank you for giving the Regroupement provincial des maisons d'hébergement et de transition pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale the opportunity to present its views today. I speak today on behalf of 48 member facilities located in 16 of the 17 administrative regions of Quebec.

Since our group was founded in 1979, our members have given us the mandate to bring about far-reaching social change in order to gradually eliminate spousal abuse. In order to achieve that, our organization has regularly made representations to the Government of Canada, and particularly, the Government of Quebec.

Right from the start, women working for shelters clearly saw that inequalities in such areas as education, access to employment, legal status, economic autonomy and issues related to marriage and family, made women vulnerable to male domination. Providing shelter and support is not enough to help them escape the violence. Therefore, removing the objective of the pursuit of equality from the Department's mandate is something that we consider completely unacceptable and that we believe to be a clear violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women,

as well as other treaties and conventions signed by Canada, whether they deal with civil and political rights or economic and social rights.

For our organization and many others, the changes made to the terms and conditions of the Women's Program will have serious negative impacts. For example, without the Women's Program, we and our members would never have been able to lead the battle in Quebec for the right of abused women to access shelters, nor would we have succeeded in convincing the provincial government to make an additional \$30 million commitment. Indeed, since 2003, an extra \$18 million has been spent on direct services for women.

Regarding the Divorce Act, it would have been impossible to add our voice to that of other groups in order to let the federal government know that judges often do not consider violence when granting custody and access. We would never have had an opportunity to take part in the work of the Women and Justice Tripartite Committee created by the Government of Quebec with a view to improving the way domestic violence offences are treated by the legal system. And we could not have demanded and secured changes to the Quebec Civil Code so that abused women have the right to break their lease if their personal safety is at risk. These are only some of the women's equality initiatives funded by the Women's Program in recent years.

Will we now have to invest both time and money in fundraising, to ensure that abused women will be able to cope? Will we have to increase dues paid by our members in order to replace the Women's Program subsidy? That will be tantamount to removing 3,000 hours of direct intervention with women, and some years, it would even be 3,600 hours. We did not fight to secure funding just to see services cut back subsequently.

And if some organizations involved in advocacy can no longer afford this, what will happen? Will we have to pay consultants to make up for the lack of partner groups with more expertise at the federal level who can help us defend the rights of abused women with respect to divorce and where criminal matters are concerned? I am thinking in particular of the National Association of Women and the Law, better known as NAWL.

We certainly cannot expect to help abused women if we have no opportunity to let people know that they need social housing, that they need protection under the law, and that they need a decent income. Yet there seems to be an attempt to encourage us to do just that, even though those needs are in fact rights.

In addition, budget cuts at Status of Women Canada will lead to other serious problems. Cutting back the Department's budget is tantamount to destroying a mechanism that is critical for the equality of Canadian women. These cuts will result in the elimination of positions held by women and the demotion of certain female workers. The office closures will result in a lack of expertise and knowledge with respect to concrete realities on the ground, in each of the provinces, as well as much longer processing times. Because of a reduced ability to take action and influence other departments, laws and programs will no longer consider potential impacts on women. It will be just too bad for equality.

Finally, the elimination of the research carried out by Status of Women Canada or funded under the Women's Program will deprive us of important information for policy development. As is clear to us all, the budget cuts and changes to SWC's mandate jeopardize not only Status of Women Canada, but the equality of all Canadian women. We very much hope that the government will change its mind.

• (1555)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Riendeau.

We have Paulette Senior from the YWCA Canada.

Ms. Paulette Senior (Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair and committee members.

Thank you for the opportunity and the invitation to present the views of YWCA Canada on the two areas identified specifically as the potential impact of recent funding cuts and the program changes at Status of Women Canada.

My presence here today is an indication of the level of importance YWCA Canada places on the issues at hand, particularly considering the wide-reaching impact on women in Canada.

Let me preface my comments by providing some historical context and background to the YWCA. Since 1871, the YWCA has been providing programs and services to women, girls, and their families in Canada. Our history here began when Mrs. Hoodless recognized that unpasteurized milk was the cause of her child's illness and eventual death. She took the initiative to lobby the authorities of the day to ensure that no other children would become ill from milk. Today, her contributions in this area continue to live on in the spirit of the YWCA.

I share this small bit of history with you to make an obvious but important point: our 135-year history is founded not only on responding to the program and service needs of women; the importance of advocacy and research formed a critical part of our history, and still does today.

In 2006, the need to advocate for women's equality remains an important priority for the YWCA. In fact, it is integral to our mission, which is to be a voice for equality and a strong voice for women. As we move forward in a new strategic vision, public policy and advocacy form a significant part of our focus over the next four years.

So why this focus? If for no other reason but to bring attention and voice to the issues and barriers faced by ordinary women right across Canada. As the country's largest multiservice national women's organization, the YWCA provides programs and services to over one million women, girls, and their families in over 200 communities across Canada. We know of what we speak, and speak we must.

Thus comes our need to raise our collective voice with other national and regional women's organizations to emphasize the point that the cuts to Status of Women Canada and the regional offices are already having a negative impact on our ability to serve women with proven best practice models.

Specifically, I can mention our recent release of effective practices in sheltering women fleeing violence, which is the second phase of this project. It is unfortunate that as we were about to launch into phase 3 of the shelter study, the project as designed no longer qualifies under the new terms and conditions. Despite the incredible work completed over the past three years, we are now in a state of limbo and great uncertainty in continuing this critical work to effectively respond to violence against women and in seeking ways to work collaboratively and in partnership with government and community stakeholders.

Phase 2 was successfully approached in this collaborative manner, and thus deals with critical information from 368 women residing in 10 shelters across the country. In this landmark study, shelter residents and providers responded openly to queries regarding service quality, client needs, and identified gaps.

It is difficult to imagine a better way for the government of the day to demonstrate democracy in action, particularly as it relates to issues impacting women's equality. This and other similar initiatives are demonstrable examples of government and community effectively working collaboratively to improve, and in some cases save, the lives of ordinary Canadian women.

Thus we cannot underestimate the impact and importance of research and advocacy as they relate to service provision to women on the ground. As mentioned previously, the YWCA has been delivering these very services for over 130 years. Our success is due to our persistence in pursuit of women's and girls' equality, as reflected in these principles and commitment in our programs and services.

In conclusion, I urge you to reinstate if not strengthen the principles and commitments of equality and advocacy in the terms and conditions, and to reverse the cuts to Status of Women Canada and the regional offices across the country, thus re-invoking the practice and spirit of partnership that has led to advancing women's equality in Canada.

In 2006, we cannot afford to lose the ground we have gained, only to see these gains eroded due to misplaced ideological beliefs. Canadian women and girls deserve better.

Thank you.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go into questions from our members.

Ms. Minna, you have seven minutes for questions and answers.

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

I appreciate the presentation that was made here today. You're all very strong voices.

Much of what you've said, I and my other colleagues on this side have been saying for some weeks now, and we continue to, so there isn't a disagreement.

I was watching an interview with the minister a couple of days ago on *Mike Duffy Live*. She was saying the cuts aren't the issue because the cuts will be redirected, although that remains to be seen. We've seen nothing to that effect; I received a letter from the minister that doesn't mention any of that.

But putting that aside for a moment, it's bad enough, but for me the money is really bad. The biggest offence is the criteria change, because it's saying women's equality in this country doesn't matter, it's not the government's responsibility, it doesn't exist, and it's changing that altogether.

When she was asked about that, about shutting up the voices of women who do the research and the advocacy—many of you have given all kinds of terrific examples—she said that was fine, there's no problem, and why should the government have to pay for it?

It's as if somehow the money is coming out of her pocket and she's having to pay for it, as opposed to all of us looking after each other.

I'd like you to tell us, and to tell her through us, why the Government of Canada should be paying for it, or why your tax dollars should be paying for it. I'd appreciate that. You've given us some examples. Give it to us in as direct a message as you can as to why we should be paying for it, because it relates very directly to the mandate.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Riendeau: Canada adopted a Charter of Rights and Freedoms, it also signed international conventions under which it has an obligation to treat men and women equally. Equality is not something that is supposed to be realized gradually; it is an immediate obligation for all the signatory governments. So, the government has a responsibility to protect these rights, to promote them and to implement them.

That is why it is so important for the government to fund mechanisms that will allow us to work to advance the rights of women in Canada.

Ms. Jackie Steele: I would just like to add that the Conservative minority government is currently responsible for managing taxpayers' money, but that money does not belong to it. It should be using the money that is entrusted to it responsibly and in a manner that is consistent with its constitutional obligations.

We live in a constitutional democracy. The limitations on political power are enshrined in the Canadian Constitution and the Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That money belongs to all the women and men of Canada, and it has to be used to advance democratic principles that we have a duty to abide by as diverse political communities within the Canadian federation.

Ms. Mariette Gilbert: We have rights, but just because certain statutes or charters grant us rights does not mean that they are automatically respected. It is important to work to implement them. Actions that have been taken in Quebec have been very successful. Even though the situation is not entirely satisfactory in our opinion, the fact is that more than 30% of the members of the National Assembly are women. Progress has also been made in other areas. If all we needed was for a law to be passed in order for people to comply, we wouldn't need police forces or any other type of mechanism, or the Auditor General, for that matter.

Just because a law has been passed doesn't mean that it is automatically understood and accepted by everyone. People do not necessarily change their attitudes just because we tell them they have to do something. Specific measures have to be taken to support and implement such changes.

• (1605)

[*English*]

Ms. Paulette Senior: If I may add to that, I completely agree with my colleagues at the table. The only piece I could add to that is to say that if we don't support and pay for those programs and make sure we reinstate the funding to the size we had, and also support equality measures, we're going to be paying for them later through other means. And we know from the experience of the YWCA that that is what happens.

Hon. Maria Minna: It seems that I have only one minute left, so very briefly, because it helps me a great deal—I think I have some of the answers, but I just want to put it on the record—could you give me a specific example of the kinds of things that will be impacted by the changes of the criteria, not the costs but the changes of the criteria specifically? That's the major pernicious thing for me.

Ms. Paulette Senior: I mentioned in my comments the shelter study we did. It's the first ever national shelter study of its kind. We do need to be able to continue that work, but under the new terms and conditions we won't be able to. In fact, one particular important part of doing the study was to be able to bring together all the different federal departments that impact women's lives when women experience violence in their lives, such as justice, such as health, such as homelessness, and so on. So we were able to, in phase 2, get funding from all of these different departments to do that, because the premise of the recommendation was that we need to have an integrated response to violence against women, at the government level and at the community level. We are not able to have that sort of integrated response now from the government, and therefore it's impacting our ability to be able to do that on the ground as well. At the end of the day, we won't be getting that kind of support.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Riendeau: I just want to add that all the examples I gave you could not be achieved today. We could no longer go and explain to the Government of Quebec or the federal government that abused women are afraid to press charges, for example, and that they cannot actually exercise their rights, even though those rights exist and are protected under the Criminal Code.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The next questioner will be Ms. Mourani.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair. First of all, I would like to thank you all for your presentations and for being with us today.

This question is addressed to all of you. In your opinion, what are the major or minor implications of the closure of SWC offices, and the fact that we will now have only four offices for all of Canada?

What do you think of that? What are the practical implications of those closures?

Ms. Louise Riendeau: First of all, it is obvious that with only four offices, SWC officers will be nowhere near the communities they will be called upon to serve. So, we are certainly talking about a loss of knowledge. I am sure that there will be a learning curve for officers in Quebec, if they have to provide services in new areas.

Furthermore, the process for reviewing applications already took a very long time. We can certainly expect that it will take even longer now. We certainly cannot conceive of SWC being able to provide better service with less staff.

In addition to that, there will obviously be direct job losses for some women. That is also a concern for us.

Ms. Jackie Steele: The Collectif Féminisme et Démocratie benefited from the support of staff in Montreal to develop its project. Twice we tried to submit projects but we were only successful the second time. I have to say that this would not have been possible if staff in Montreal had not provided some follow-up, because it is difficult to use the Internet if you're not sure of all the ramifications or what type of project could meet the stated objectives. We obviously needed support in that area.

And with only four regional offices, we expect there to be increased demand. As a result, we may well not benefit from this kind of very concrete support for future applications. As well, coming back to the question posed by the Honourable Marie Minna with respect to eligibility criteria, most of our work involves political action for women and providing women with the tools they need to be full participants in the democratic life of our society.

The new criteria do not recognize legitimate work of that kind. We want to be sure that we can participate fully in the economic, cultural and social life of this country, but we are told that as citizens, we have no right to a voice that can help us influence public policies and access our governments, to make our voices heard and to let them know what kinds of public policies we would like to see implemented. It is ridiculous to claim that all these rights — political, economic, social, cultural and civil — are not interconnected.

• (1610)

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Ms. Steel, the fact that the criteria for the Women's Program have changed must have a direct impact on an organization such as yours, which is only involved in political action and advocacy, in a way.

Ms. Jackie Steele: Yes, of course.

We used to receive funding under the Women's Program to provide a series of training sessions to women all across Quebec. Our goal is to equip women to engage in political action, so that they can get involved in their community and participate in the democratic life of this country. That kind of activity will no longer be eligible.

I should also say that, in many cases, the funds are used for managing and coordinating projects. Our educators work on a volunteer basis when they go into the regions to provide training to women. So, we're talking about small amounts of money that help to ensure some coordination in terms of all the requests for training we receive from various groups all across Quebec, whether it is the Outaouais, the Megantic or the Northern Quebec region.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Does that mean that your organization might end up shutting down?

Ms. Jackie Steele: What it means is that, from now on, our activities will be carried out on a purely volunteer basis. Of course, under such conditions, it becomes extremely difficult to operate. Under these conditions, it is difficult to really influence public policies. We believe that the government has a responsibility to truly support access for women and give them a voice in terms of public policies and governance, at the municipal, provincial or federal levels.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you.

Yes, Ms. Gilbert.

Ms. Mariette Gilbert: We have another major concern, which is that funding will also be available to for-profit organizations. They already have greater means than we do. Much of the work carried out by groups such as ours depends entirely on volunteers. Indeed, the Women's Program is, in my opinion, one of the most cost-effective programs delivered by the Canadian government, given that it involves tens of thousands of hours of volunteer work carried out on the ground. It is the eyes and ears of government.

We are also concerned because for-profit organizations will have access to resources that we probably do not have in terms of developing, implementing and promoting their projects. Implementing a project necessarily involves a considerable number of hours, given the follow-up that is required and the assessments that have to be carried out. There is no possibility of fraud with projects carried out under the Women's Program: the files are really very closely monitored.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you.

Yes, Ms. Senior.

[English]

Ms. Paulette Senior: The point I'd like to make is that the YWCA is spread right across the country, so organizations such as the YWCA in Edmonton and the YWCA in Kitchener-Waterloo have been able to utilize the regional offices, particularly around issues of women getting into politics. They've been able to launch successful projects to increase women's participation in politics and have had amazing results. With the limitations that exist, we won't be able to get funding for those kinds of initiatives.

One of the things I hear about most from our members across the country is the limited access there is now. We have a YWCA in Yellowknife and another in Vancouver, and the Vancouver office is one that is targeted. So the physical access alone is an issue for us.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Senior.

Our next questioner is Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you for joining us today to put forth your opinions and your information.

I am interested, because as of now you still get the funding; it's in place until 2007. I am hoping you are aware of that.

I know you're here today in an advocacy position, and I think that's very good. You've done much good work and I commend you for that.

Right now, taking a look at the criteria and everything we have before us, I would like to direct a question to Ms. Steele. Being a woman in the political field, and talking about wanting equality in the political field, I got the impression you think there should be a 50-50 ratio of men and women in the Parliament.

Can you tell me how your organization has helped that out, or what would you advocate to make that happen so that women have a more equal voice?

• (1615)

[Translation]

Ms. Jackie Steele: The Collectif Féminisme et Démocratie mobilizes women around four principles. As far as we are concerned, the strategy does not focus only on equal representation for women and men, even though that is the most important thrust. Since 2002, we have been mobilizing around democratic reform in Quebec, and particularly reform with respect to the voting process. What is on the table in Quebec are reforms aimed at adopting a compensatory mixed plurality proportional representation model.

Within that very model, we have presented a number of demands with a view to obtaining a formal commitment to equality in the actual body of the legislation. We have also asked that lists provide for mandatory alternation between female and male candidates elected based on proportional representation. As I mentioned, the Minister has demonstrated a firm intention to move in that direction.

We also asked that every political party be required to adopt an equality action plan, as well as an action plan on ethnocultural diversity, in order to also enhance male-female diversity.

[English]

Mrs. Joy Smith: I don't want to use up all my time on this one question. You have answered it adequately. I thank you for that.

Basically it's an advocacy program that you have put forth for this type of initiative. How much money did your association get from the Status of Women prior to our side of the House coming into government?

[Translation]

Ms. Jackie Steele: The first time that Collectif Féminisme et Démocratie submitted a project, it was not accepted. The second time — and that is a recent occurrence — we received \$30,000. This

is a small amount of money that allowed us to hire a project manager, among other things. I should also say that prior to that, we had received funding from the Government of Quebec through the *À Égalité Pour Décider* initiative. I advise you to take a close look at that program, because it is an extremely positive initiative.

[English]

Mrs. Joy Smith: So you had \$30,000 and you put it into programs for women on the ground.

[Translation]

Ms. Jackie Steele: What I just said and what I talked about earlier is that we have a range of activities. For example, we provide training in a number of areas, including on democratic issues, on our electoral process, on how to increase the number of women in political, on the effect of representation on women's equality both *de facto* and in public policies. We have also organized societal debates.

[English]

Mrs. Joy Smith: I have more questions, so please be as concise as possible.

Our government has kept all the money for funding—the \$10.8 million for programs for women, plus the Sisters in Spirit got \$1 million. No funding has been cut or reallocated in that aspect.

But if you've looked at the application, from what you describe, why wouldn't you apply for the \$5 million that is available for women's programs? It sounds like you do some very useful things.

[Translation]

Ms. Jackie Steele: The new criteria refer to women's participation in Canada's economic, social and cultural life. Nowhere does it say that women's political participation is a legitimate area of examination in terms of applications and projects. However, we provide training with the express purpose of equipping women to be engaged in democratic life and political action.

I would also like to ask you whether it's at the domestic level that you would prevent women from participating in political life.

• (1620)

[English]

Mrs. Joy Smith: I'm sorry, Madam, I'm trying to get two questions in here.

Political parties train women as well, but what I'm saying is for something like you're doing, looking at the application, you could use it as the social side or the cultural side of our society. Right now your funding hasn't been cut. The application is out there. We're inviting all Canadians to apply, and I would invite you to do that. You said you were rejected once before, and then the second time around when you applied you got some applications. So I would invite you to do that.

I want to ask Ms. Senior a question. It's very interesting, in terms of the shelters you're talking about. You've done three studies, or you're into the third end of the study on shelters.

Ms. Paulette Senior: We've completed two phases of the study.

Mrs. Joy Smith: How much money did you get for that?

Ms. Paulette Senior: For the second part of the study we got, I believe, two hundred and twenty-five from Status of Women Canada.

Mrs. Joy Smith: That's \$225,000?

Ms. Paulette Senior: Yes.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Were there any shelters built as a result of that? What specific programs were put out there for women to talk about shelters, or was it a study just to look at different types of shelters?

Ms. Paulette Senior: I actually gave you a copy of the study when we met a few months ago—

Mrs. Joy Smith: Yes, I looked at that.

Ms. Paulette Senior: —and the study is to look at the effectiveness of shelter provision and to hear from women, as well as shelter providers, in terms of what is working, what is not working, so that we can have a national perspective of how violence against women in the shelters is actually working in the country. That was the intent of the study.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Smith. Your time is up.

Our next questioner is Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you very much.

Thank you for being here.

I'm very interested in the discussion about the study that was commissioned by the YWCA. Can you explain to me what was so important about part 3? Why is it essential that we continue with part 3? What would it have shown?

Ms. Paulette Senior: First, let me say that we did not make the list of those applications that got signed on September 25, so in fact we don't have the money to do it.

The importance of phase 3 is that...phase 2 left off with a number of recommendations, the primary one of which was to be able to look at how we can have the various systems that respond to women who experience violence have a more integrated response and approach to making sure that women who end up in shelters are able to build their lives and to not experience further barriers because they end up in a shelter. This involved such things as the response in terms of the justice system, the response in terms of health issues, and the response in terms of housing and homelessness.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: In this province we've had God knows how many coroners' reports, so I assume that the work you were doing would have followed in terms of the recommendations of those coroners' reports in regard to the death of women in this province and in this country.

Ms. Paulette Senior: Absolutely.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

I have another question. There's been a lot of discussion about the need for the participation of women, in terms of political parties and in the legislatures and in the House of Commons. Only 20.8% of this House of Commons is made up of women. What are the consequences of that kind of imbalance?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Jackie Steele: Quebec has the best performance in Canada. It is no accident that we have a public daycare program and pay equity in Quebec. Nor is it an accident that public policies in Quebec really respond to needs and reflect the realities of a wide diversity of women and men.

We need better representation and a more diversified group of elected representatives to ensure that all voices can be heard when decisions are to be made. I clearly find it troubling that only 20% of members of the House of Commons are women, and that the Government of Canada's current caucus has only 11% women. I believe that influences the views that are presented and subsequently implemented through public policies.

● (1625)

[*English*]

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you. My caucus has 41%. I'm quite proud of that.

Minister Oda has said that SWC women's program applications are now online. They're there; you can just dial them up. What do you think about that, the fact that they're online?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Riendeau: In terms of checking it every day, there is nothing like personal contact to be in a position to understand what is being discussed. I could cite the example of the women who work in shelters. If you want to be sure that they get a message, it is better to call them on the telephone than it is to send them an e-mail, because they are extremely busy. In addition, new technologies do not reach every layer of society.

So, if we intend to use the Internet as a means of communication, we can certainly assume that the most disadvantaged women will not be in a position to make an application or have their voices heard.

[*English*]

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Okay. We've lost 12 offices and the expertise of 61 full-time employees. What's going to happen? What are the consequences of that move?

Ms. Paulette Senior: Let me jump in. I think it serves to really silence the voices of women, particularly in those parts of the country where the voices cannot be heard because of lack of access to technology, for example, or lack of access to major urban centres, where it's easier to get in touch with those who represent you.

There are barriers experienced by rural women in communities where there are not a lot of available people for them to connect with on issues of equality that impact their daily lives. This becomes an issue for a lot of women, who suggest that the response to just go and access the Internet doesn't really respond to their needs in their daily lives.

Ms. Jackie Steele: I want to add that I think there's a fundamental disconnect, if we're thinking that women of all economic classes have access to the Internet at home, with a laptop in their houses. Whereas you know there are 16 offices that are often located in downtown cores, and it is possible to find that assistance and receive that technical help for project development, it's unrealistic that most women would be able to access these programs.

I happened to be given the advice from Madame Smith that perhaps our group would be able to qualify, but if I'm not able to have this conversation, even at this table, because I cannot get here, if I'm not able to meet with Status of Women personnel, how am I going to receive this information?

This means that having criteria that say social, economic, and cultural and that disregard the political aspect in the funding criteria—I'm supposed to figure that out on my own, or by making personal calls to my member of Parliament or to Madame Smith to get privileged information.... I don't think that leads to systematic, equal access of all women across this country.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: We keep hearing over and over again that the actions by this government, by this minister, will silence the voice of women.

Why on earth would a government want to silence women?

Ms. Paulette Senior: I don't understand how that helps democracy. To me, it seems that the ability and the opportunity for government and community to work together can only help the government of the day. To silence people means you're not really exercising or practising democratic access for people to fully participate in society.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Jackie Steele: There is something else that comes to mind.

There is an inconsistency here that I don't understand. The Minister of International Cooperation, Ms. Josée Verner, is pledging to implement programs to promote equality and enhance the civil society's participation in the government's efforts abroad. And yet, as things now stand, women's groups in Quebec and the rest of Canada have no opportunity to make political representations, present their specific concerns, engage in democratic life or obtain government support to that end.

• (1630)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. We are out of time for our first panel.

I want to thank all of you for taking the time to come today and to present to the committee. We will take this under consideration when we put our report to the House later on, in 2007.

Thank you all very much.

I'll suspend for a moment for the other panel to come to the table.

•

_____ (Pause) _____

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• (1635)

The Chair: We'll bring our meeting back to order.

If everybody could resume their positions, I will move to introduce the next panel we have with us.

From the Canadian Labour Congress, we have Barbara Byers, the executive vice-president; from the Manitoba Association for Home Schooling, we have Gladys Hayward Williams; from the Parents for Healthy Teens, we have Doraine Wachniak, who also brought us some cookies to keep us all alert through the presentation; and from the Sexual Assault Centre in London, we have Louise Pitre, the executive director.

Thank you all very much for coming.

Ms. Byers, we will turn it over to you for a five-minute presentation. At four minutes, I will raise my pencil, so you will know that you only have one minute left.

Ms. Barbara Byers (Executive Vice-President, Canadian Labour Congress): Okay, and I should try not to avoid your pencil going up by continuing to look down.

Thank you very much for the invitation, the opportunity, to be here. I'm not going to read the document that you've received from us before, but I will highlight some key points.

As pointed out, the Canadian Labour Congress represents over three million working women and men across this country; about half of our membership are women.

Our document says that we are extremely concerned about the reduction of the Status of Women Canada budget and the changes to the terms and conditions of the women's program. It would be closer to say that we're outraged by it. This is completely unacceptable in terms of what's happened to women's programming.

We, in the Canadian Labour Congress, don't receive funding from Status of Women Canada, but we rely very much on the work that's done by women's organizations across this country—whether it's fact sheets, research, education, or work that we might use in our conferences, in on-the-ground community-based work, and all of that advocacy work that's so important to moving women's equality ahead by the labour movement.

As well, it's used by the labour movement internally to create change within our organizations, because we too come from a history of male-dominated organizations and inequalities. So the work that's being done by women's organizations is vitally important to the labour movement.

It is about creating change. It's not simply about providing money for the problems. It's about the advocacy work that creates change, and in particular change for highly disadvantaged groups, such as aboriginal women, women of colour, and women with disabilities.

Our issues are complex and obviously they're unresolved. We should not confuse people who say, well, you don't think women are equal. Of course, we think women are equal, but what we know is that women are not treated equally and that there is systemic discrimination in this country that needs to be dealt with in an advocacy way.

Policy directions have to be improved by the full participation of women and women's organizations. You had a discussion earlier about Canada's abysmal record, in terms of parliamentarians and people in our legislatures, in terms of the percentage of women. I believe I heard on the news on Sunday that we are something like 47th, or somewhere around the same area as Pakistan and Rwanda, or maybe we are after them.

We called for an increase and originally agreed with the increase in the budget. Certainly we didn't expect to see a decrease in the budget. The administrative reduction to the Status of Women Canada's budget is disturbing, to say the least. What it's going to mean is that as well as the on-the-ground work that we just heard groups talk about, we're going to see significant losses in the government's internal capacity to achieve women's equality; loss of the independent policy research fund, which was a unique initiative supporting independent research that could be used as a basis for developing policies with positive impacts; loss of the dialogue and work between the federal government and provincial governments responsible for the status of women; and cuts that will limit our own country's ability to intervene on women's economic, social, and political equality at the United Nations and other international forums.

I would indicate here that there was a letter sent I believe by six women who are Nobel Peace Prize winners. They wrote to the Harper government, calling on it to change the actions against the Status of Women Canada and equality rights.

To the question of identifying emerging issues....

Is that one minute or am I at the end?

The Chair: One minute.

Ms. Barbara Byers: All right.

I want to close by saying that we shouldn't look at these cuts in isolation. What we've seen are other cuts by this government in the area of literacy that greatly affect women: the whole question of post-secondary education losses that are going to affect women; obviously the loss of the child care program; the lack of movement on pay equity; the loss of the court challenges program; and no movement on unemployment insurance—currently, about 30% of women get UI, and in fact in some areas it's as low as 16% or 9%.

● (1640)

Finally, I just want to say that our push on reclaiming the rights to advocacy and reclaiming the rights to make change are about honouring our mothers and our grandmothers who created the change that we now get the advantage of. It's also about honouring what we need to do for our daughters and our granddaughters.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Byers.

Our next presenter, from the Manitoba Association for Schooling at Home, is Gladys Hayward Williams.

Welcome.

Ms. Gladys Hayward Williams (Past member, Manitoba Association for Home Schooling): Thank you, Madam Chair. I am an ex-member of the association and am not speaking on their behalf.

I'm at least the third generation of empowered females in my family. It was interesting to hear you speak of mothers and grandmothers. My grandmother on my father's side was an original Canadian pioneer, actually breaking sod as a homesteader in Saskatchewan and building a stronger Canada in the process. Before my grandparents travelled to Saskatchewan, she spent the winter sewing the tent they lived in until they built a house on their homestead. Later, when their children—my dad and his sister—became school-aged, the family moved to Manitoba and settled on the farm outside Winnipeg, where I live now.

About the same time, my grandmother on my mother's side had her own home-based business, in that she operated a boarding house in the early days of Winnipeg. Her family's favourite client was Garnet Coulter, mayor of Winnipeg. Because he boarded with the family, conversations around the dinner table were both eclectic and dynamic.

Both my mother and I were raised with a great respect for education, and we each went to university and pursued our careers. For each of us, we conscientiously left our careers to focus on raising our families and putting our best efforts forward to build a strong new generation. During that time, we each joined our respective husbands in home-based businesses. For my mother and father, they were successful farmers in what is becoming an increasingly rare accomplishment. They were able to earn a living and raise a family solely from their farm income. For myself, I joined my husband in raising our family, schooling them at home, and developing a home-based company for computer-based geographic information systems.

My mother and I re-entered our professions after the demands of raising a family became fewer. To that end, last year I attended the University of Manitoba, upgraded to a degree of physical therapy, and wrote the national physiotherapy exam, as well as winning an election for school trustee.

I said all that so that I can say this: women are at the very least equal. And I agree again with my cohort. We are pioneers. We are entrepreneurs, business owners, professionals, and nurturers. We are building strong generations and a better Canada, and we are doing it alongside women and men.

In my family, we are intelligent women. We are educated women. We are not afraid to make tough choices, not afraid of hard work. Running a home, with its budgeting, management, prioritizing, and time efficiency issues, is the equivalent of running a small business. When Status of Women is pursuing equal pay for work of equal value, should they not also place a greater value on the work that women do in our homes and with our families?

The fact is that under the Charter of Rights, all Canadians, male and female, are equal. What isn't equal are the barriers and challenges that we each individually face. What makes us who we are and sets us apart from each other is how we deal with those challenges and barriers. I support the fact that by changing the mandate for the Status of Women, we have removed at least one barrier for women and made more funding more available to more women. More front-line groups will now be eligible for funding for their efforts to support women in overcoming their day-to-day barriers. I also support making more dollars available to groups giving direct assistance to victims of violence. We have spent many years and many dollars on research. Let's get on with putting money into the hands of groups that help women overcome barriers. We've cut enough bait. Let's get on with fishing.

•(1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The next witness is Doraine Wachniak from Parents for Healthy Teens.

Mrs. Doraine Wachniak (Representative, Parents for Healthy Teens): Madam Chair, I would like to thank the taxpayers of Canada for inviting me to this meeting.

It is my second visit to Ottawa in my 50 years, and at the pace I've seen since I came off the airline, I'm hoping I don't come back too soon.

Parents for Healthy Teens is a group of volunteer women committed to advancing the promotion of lifelong sexual health for teens.

It is well-documented that young women suffer proportionately more from the consequences of early sexual involvement. We agree with the Manitoba government that the primary responsibility for education about issues of sexuality, including AIDS, rests with the family.

Parents for Healthy Teens was formed around 1998. Our involvement with teen sexual health has been at both the local and the provincial levels. As a group of women, we have single-handedly

raised funds in our community to circulate flyers to the homes in our community, identifying the value regarding lifelong sexual health.

We have worked to host a Canadian obstetrician, gynecologist, clinical professor, author, researcher, and writer, Dr. Stephen Genuis, to come to our community and speak to parents and community groups such as the RCMP, school trustees, health care workers, school staff, and parent council representatives, etc.

On our own efforts, we have purchased hundreds of dollars of research resource materials to be available to our local high school.

We have made presentations to numerous government bodies to share our concerns about the physical, social, and emotional consequences of early sexual activity within our youth population.

We have collaborated successfully with our local high school to implement an option for parents and students in the area of physical education and health.

All of the above has taken place with volunteer hours and our own dollars.

We are pleased and extremely supportive of the broadened mandate for the Status of Women. This change will provide us with an opportunity to apply to Status of Women for funding if we wish to do so. The previous mandate excluded us.

We would disagree that the changes to the terms and conditions of the women's program under the Status of Women undermines the very basis of our democracy. Our opinion is that in time and with widespread notice of these changes, your department will mobilize more women to assist women and girls in need.

Thank you for listening.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Louise Pitre from the Sexual Assault Centre in London, welcome.

Ms. Louise Pitre (Executive Director, Sexual Assault Centre London): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Because my community had a local Status of Women Canada office, we had technical support that was easily accessible, and those most marginalized in our community, as well as their advocates, were able to access women's program funding. Because of that, we were able to achieve some very important outcomes.

Some of those successes include a women's mental health survivors' group, which started as a non-incorporated grassroots group that later became a provincial group, developed evidence-based guidelines for women's mental health, and best practices that were shared and adopted across the province and the country.

From there, they developed a program for homeless women called My Sister's Place, a program that has seen countless women who otherwise were completely disenfranchised take up their citizenry and participate in the community in countless ways.

We also had a grassroots group of women living in poverty in rural Ontario produce and publish a resource book, *How We Count*, a book that has become a springboard for people to talk about the links between women's poverty, woman abuse, and women's economic security.

We also had a centre for research on violence against women and children that has been successful in engaging and giving voice to marginalized young women, our future.

And in northern Ontario, aboriginal women, the most invisible in our country and in our communities, through the efforts of Equaywuk, a women's group, worked with women in isolated communities in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation to conduct and deliver leadership workshops.

These examples illustrate significant and meaningful outcomes in the lives of women, in particular marginalized women in their communities. These are local outcomes that respond to the particular issues, needs, and challenges faced by our communities.

These outcomes were possible because local and accessible support was available to us. These outcomes were possible because we were given ongoing social development support through a local office.

The implications of the changes and the cuts are devastating. Grassroots women's groups, mostly non-incorporated groups, mostly marginalized communities, such as refugees and immigrants, girls, first nations, francophones, will no longer be able to access the women's program funding, resources, and knowledge. All of the examples I gave you earlier, all of those groups, under the new terms and conditions, will not be able to access funding.

If grassroots groups become incorporated, we will have to compete with for-profit organizations for women's program funding. If grassroots groups become incorporated, we will have to navigate electronically the proposal writing process. Contrary to the minister's belief, electronic access to the funding application results in less access for marginalized groups of women, who from the get-go have little access to resources.

By gutting the infrastructure that connected the government to its citizens at a local level and centralizing program delivery in one office with two people for the entire region of Ontario, as well as for the national groups, the government has guaranteed that access will be diminished, if not completely eliminated. The government has guaranteed that those most marginalized in our society will remain at the margins. The government has guaranteed a low return on investment for every \$1 of funding disbursed. The systemic changes required to address the issues of social justice, women's economic autonomy, and violence against women and children will no longer be possible.

Prior to the changes made to the mandate of the women's program and the cuts to Status of Women Canada, grassroots women's groups and other equality-seeking groups had access to district and regional offices. We were able to help the government understand our local issues. With the technical assistance and funding we received, we were able to explore the realities of women's lives and use these insights towards transformative social action and change. We were able to increase women's participation in all levels of Canadian life, including political, legal, social, economic, and cultural. We were able to contribute to building healthier communities. We were able to move out of the margins of society to become more active and productive citizens.

Women across this country will not accept these changes and these cuts. The cost is too great. The issue here is not \$5 million; the government has a surplus of \$13.2 billion. The issue is this minority government's ideological opposition to women's equality.

I urge the standing committee to further extend its consultation to local and regional women, to find out what women across the country are saying about these changes and what they are saying about women's equality in Canada.

●(1650)

I urge the standing committee to exercise its power and reclaim women's equality for all women in Canada.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

We will go to questions.

Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I have to say, being biased and all, that I want to give a nice round of applause for Madam Pitre's last comments and for Ms. Byers'. So I have to admit that at the outset.

I do want to ask some questions, though, of Ms. Williams and also of Ms. Wachniak.

One of you mentioned helping individual women with respect to domestic violence locally. Then you talked about girls and sexual education and so on in the schools, which is all within provincial jurisdiction, which has nothing whatever to do, in any case, with this particular program.

I don't quite understand why or how the moneys that would be used to address specific issues, specific problems like domestic violence—and I've worked in this field myself with immigrant women before I ran—for a specific woman who is having specific problems, and trying to help her with housing, shelter, education for herself and possibly the husband and so on, in any way assists the issue when we cannot address the systemic problem. What the change of criteria does is it takes away the ability of women to do research and to address the systemic problem. All we're doing is fixing that one woman's issue, but we're not addressing the problem of all the women who are facing domestic violence.

I don't understand what your problem is with Status of Women Canada's mandate as it was.

•(1655)

Mrs. Doraine Wachniak: I found it exclusive.

Hon. Maria Minna: But the mandate was for equality, to fight for women's equality, and unless you're fighting for women's equality.... I guess my question is why you feel excluded from a mandate that says this is about assisting all women in Canada to reach equality.

Mrs. Doraine Wachniak: Because under the mandate it says you have to be advancing equality for women.

Hon. Maria Minna: Why would you not want to advance equality for women?

Mrs. Doraine Wachniak: Why would we not want to advance equality?

Hon. Maria Minna: Yes, because if you had a program that was advancing equality for women, then you would have no problem.

Mrs. Doraine Wachniak: It appears that the terminology is exclusive, because if we, within our mandate as an organization, were not identifying that as our specific goal, then in fact we would not qualify for the funding.

Hon. Maria Minna: Go ahead, Ms. Williams.

Ms. Gladys Hayward Williams: I understand your question is about why we want the money to go to general research instead of to helping individual women.

I guess my answer to that would be that it just reminds me of a story I heard of two people walking down the beach. There were all these starfish on the beach and they were stranded. One of them kept picking them up and throwing them back in, and the other asked why he was doing that because there were just so many on the beach. How could he possibly make a difference? He picked another one up and threw it in and said, "Well, it mattered to that one."

I think where we need to get the money is directly to the people who are in need.

Hon. Maria Minna: But with all due respect, Ms. Williams, your story doesn't hold water because—

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Hon. Maria Minna: I'm sorry, can I say...? I said it didn't hold water, I didn't say—

The Chair: Ms. Smith has a point of order.

Ms. Minna, wait.

Mrs. Joy Smith: We have guests in this building who are presenting to us. They deserve respect, even if they don't agree with the member opposite's point of view. I would like the member to treat all people with respect at committee.

Hon. Maria Minna: I am doing that. All I'm saying is that I disagree with the premise. All I'm saying is that the terminology means the same thing. I'm saying I disagree with the premise, because I would hope that in this country we're not just going to be dealing with one issue but with the problem that affects all women. So we should be dealing with both.

There are programs provincially—some of them are federal—to address the specific issues of the specific women who are facing domestic violence, but we also have to address the systemic problem in the broader sense in terms of research and changing the conditions that affect their lives. We can't just deal with the individuals; we also have to deal with the situation, with the condition they live in.

Are you saying we should not be dealing with the condition that affects those women?

Ms. Gladys Hayward Williams: I'm sure that if we're dealing with a woman who comes to your door and says to you she is in crisis, there is a problem with violence, and she needs help—

Hon. Maria Minna: We don't disagree with that.

Ms. Gladys Hayward Williams: If you were to say to her, I'm going to take that to the Status of Women and we are going to research that quite thoroughly, I'm sure that would make her feel good on some level, but it's not really what she needs right now.

Hon. Maria Minna: I'd like to move on, if I could, to Madame Pitre and to Ms. Byers.

I'll ask you the same question I asked the previous group. The minister said that the advocacy and research stuff is fine to do but asked why she should pay for it.

Can you tell us why the government should pay for that kind of research?

•(1700)

Ms. Louise Pitre: Sure.

I think if we look at it in terms of a river, the mandate of the women's program, when you focus on the research piece—and maybe we will need to talk a little bit later about what participatory action research is, because it's action research—is about doing something upstream rather than doing something downstream.

When you're dealing with those systemic issues, you're dealing with them upstream. Therefore, you're going to make an impact downstream, and there will be less need for direct service because we will begin to address the issues at a systemic level.

Ms. Barbara Byers: My response would be very similar.

We need to change the systemic discrimination that women face. There is no one from the women's equality movement who would oppose more money, and in fact we've been calling for more money to go to women's programming to help individual women as those problems occur.

I'll just refer back to my past life as a social worker, in which oftentimes I worked with women in crisis. One of the things I was taught early on by a very sage woman social worker, who had dedicated her whole life to women and children and changing conditions, was that if you're not a social advocate as a social worker, then all you're going to do is deal with one problem after the next, one file and then another file, and you won't change the lives of those women. That's why the advocacy work is important.

Think of where we wouldn't be if we hadn't the advocacy work and the research work that was done by women's organizations till now. Start to pull out all that wonderful work that's been done, by the court challenges program, by NAWL, by FAFIA, by CRIAW. The list goes on and on. Think of where all of the women—all of us, in this room, and all the men who have women in their lives—would be if we hadn't had that advocacy work. That's what's critical. Yes, we have to do the work.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mourani.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ladies, I want to begin by thanking you for being here and providing your testimony.

A report recommending that proactive legislation be passed on pay equity was released at one point, but we still have no legislation, and the current government has told us that it isn't necessary. At the same time, it's important to point out that previous governments did no better.

Ms. Byers, you represent the Canadian Labour Congress, and I would like to know what you think of that?

[English]

Ms. Barbara Byers: Pay equity is about women's economic equality, and that's for all women. We think it's absolutely shameful that we don't have national pay equity legislation in this country. In fact, it should exist in every province.

We had a very well-researched, well-consulted report that came out in May of 2004, in response to which there was no action—you're quite right—from the previous government, and it should have been acted on. We should all be enjoying the benefits of pay equity legislation at the federal level by now.

When the current government says we're going to go back to 1978, when women were told exactly the same things—let's research

it, let's talk about, let's educate people more—I say again that we don't need to educate more. Women understand very clearly about wage discrimination. They face it every time they take a paycheque home and every time they try to create some economic equality for their family.

It's shameful that we don't have it, but it's also part of the work that we've all been doing, trying to push to make sure that we get pay equity for women.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: The government has said to us that we don't need this legislation, because there are already procedures in place that will ensure that equity is achieved. It always comes back to the Charter.

The Court Challenges Program has been abolished. How do you see that decision, from an advocacy perspective?

• (1705)

[English]

Ms. Barbara Byers: The elimination of the court challenges program, the elimination of even just the word “equality” in the mandate.... If we have pay equality, if we have equal pay for work of equal value in this country, how come women on average are still paid 71¢ for every dollar that a man earns? If you're a woman of colour, it's around 60¢. If you're an aboriginal woman, it's around 40¢ on the dollar.

Of course we need it, and of course we need to move on it. It's interesting, the question that was raised with the previous group of panellists. I firmly believe that if we had more women in the House of Commons and throughout all levels of politics, we'd have pay equity by now, because women understand it very clearly.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: My next question is addressed to Ms. Wachniak and Ms. Hayward Williams.

Do you believe that, at this time, women in Canada are equal to men?

[English]

Mrs. Doraine Wachniak: They are, absolutely.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Could you give me examples to show that women are really equal to men?

[English]

Mrs. Doraine Wachniak: I'm going to just go on.

Before I came here, I made a concerted effort to speak to 43 women. I asked them what they knew of and whether they had accessed the services of Status of Women Canada. The vast majority of the 43—42 women—had heard of the group; on the second question, some of those 42 had not. One of them absolutely had heard of them, and had friends who had accessed services of it, so in terms of equality, most of those women are feeling empowered, feeling they have a position in society that does not require a lot of.... I'm not sure how to word it; I just don't feel unequal.

Ms. Gladys Hayward Williams: As for me, I am currently employed as a physiotherapist. We have pay equity. I don't think there are any options on that. The majority of the rest of the people in the hospital are nurses, and they have pay equity, so in my world, yes, absolutely. I would say for sure that we are at least equal. Again, my professional leader is female, and her boss is female as well, so I'm not concerned.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you, Ms. Williams.

Ms. Byers and Ms. Pitre, do you have a different opinion on that? Do you believe that women are equal to men?

Ms. Louise Pitre: I would say they are not. In my opinion, current statistics clearly show that. I would be very curious to know what statistics my colleagues are relying on to say that women are equal to men.

I believe it was Ms. Byers who mentioned that compared to men, women's wages amount to 71 ¢ on the dollar. Furthermore, one woman in four is a victim of violence. In that sense, I do not believe that we are equal to men.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Pitre.

Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Thank you.

I find this very interesting today. There are two members of our committee who are really saying what we've heard some other people say about women being unequal. I've always said, and I believe it is our mandate here in the Status of Women, that women are equal and that we need to work at the barriers. Under the Constitution, women are equal. I would never downgrade women and say they're unequal and we'll advocate to make them equal. Under that Constitution in Canada, we are all equal. That doesn't negate the fact that there are barriers that have to be addressed.

Ms. Wachniak, your group has worked very, very hard on this program. I understand from your presentation today that for a number of years a lot of volunteers have come forward.

You said you felt that Status of Women was now inclusive. Could you compare and contrast what you mean by that? We have changed the terms and conditions before. How did you feel that it was not inclusive before? What makes you feel that it now more readily suits what you need for your program on the ground?

• (1710)

Mrs. Doraine Wachniak: My answer would be specifically that I'm not volunteering in my community based on building equity in women. I don't feel I am not equal to men. If you want to define it as having different barriers, you can define it that way, but it's not how I feel.

I look at so many aspects. I see so many progressive women. I'm not on the same page with you at all. I'm a local person who is working for the best interests of young people and their health. I have a heck of a lot of respect for families.

I just find it to be a much more inclusive mandate. I think that is what women of Canada will find when they access the application form.

Mrs. Joy Smith: That is exactly what this government and this minister has tried to do, to make sure it impacts on women directly on the ground. We heard across the country that there is so much research and there are so many studies and when is the action going to happen.

Mrs. Doraine Wachniak: I would agree. You have a report from 1991 on women's violence. You have a report of 800 submissions, from 1993, on women's violence. We're still using it as one of the priorities. Where have we been? Why, 13 years later, is it still a major issue for women? Who isn't dealing with it? Who hasn't got to the guts of this?

A voice: We will.

Mrs. Doraine Wachniak: I have 44 services in Manitoba for women alone. You're telling me I need your service too? Come on, you guys, there are some real errors here. I look at all the services for women that are available. Why are we still here with groups like this saying they need \$600,000 or \$200,000 or \$300,000 to do the same thing?

I know where it is. It's building and strengthening families in Canada. It's in capacity building of families, not capacity building of some women's organization somewhere that doesn't represent me.

When I ask 43 women who the Status of Women is and what they do, they say they don't know and that they've never accessed your service. They are the women walking the streets. I didn't know half of those women. Don't tell me I went to my church and asked the same thinking group; they weren't.

It makes me damn mad that I'm sitting in front of you looking at all the services we have and we're going to continue to say we need more money. We don't need more money; we need to get to the heart of the solutions. Period.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Exactly. I really applaud you for saying that. That's exactly where our minister is trying to change things, so it is inclusive and so that organizations on the ground, women's programming....

We still have the \$10.8 million for the women's programming. We have added to the Sisters in Spirit funding. We have supported them, because those are aboriginal needs that are needed.

We're trying to change the face of Status of Women now. Status of Women is about families. It is about making life better for families.

I really thank you for your presentation today. It has been very, very useful.

Ms. Hayward, would you like to comment on that as well?

Ms. Gladys Hayward Williams: Yes, I completely agree with Doraine that we do need more action. We need more action.

I'd like to refer back, if I can, to the previous panel, where there was a group asking for money so that they could prepare people for political office. I mentioned in my report that I had just been through an election, and there was nothing there for me, but I had heard of it being provided by the senior election official in other areas. That would be, to me, the way it should be done—very inclusive, very non-partisan, and right there, where every election is happening.

I know there is a concern, and I have that concern as well, that we do need to be encouraging women to be running for elected office. For me, in my ward, there were three candidates—all female. I'm elected to a board where five out of nine are female. We went to a provincial convention, and when I looked around the room, there was a significant predominance of females.

• (1715)

Mrs. Joy Smith: What do you think of all this lobbying that's been happening right now around the table? What do you think the average Canadian woman like you would—

Mrs. Doraine Wachniak: I can't compete against these women. I can't compete against the four first ones here. They've had a lot of backing, they've had a lot of training, and they're very good. I don't know whether it's money. I don't know if they're all volunteers. I have no idea where their sources of income—

Mrs. Joy Smith: No, they're not volunteers.

Mrs. Doraine Wachniak: Do you know what? Do you want to be fair? You bring in 800 women randomly selected across this country to this table to sit down to see what women are talking about. I'm talking about being at a parent council meeting, because I'm interested in my school. I'm talking about whether my car tire is going to be flat tomorrow morning when I want to drive to work.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Wachniak.

The next questioner is Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: I have some questions. I'd like to address my first one to Ms. Williams.

You say that you have pay equity. Are you aware of women who may not enjoy that level of economic autonomy? In other words, do you believe that aboriginal women, visible minority women, disabled women enjoy the same economic advantages as you do?

Ms. Gladys Hayward Williams: Equal pay, male or female, in my profession...we are paid according to a scale that does not reflect gender. That's correct.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: All right. Are you aware of women who may not enjoy that economic autonomy, for example, aboriginal

women, visible minority women, disabled women? Do you think they have the same economic advantages as you say you have?

Ms. Gladys Hayward Williams: Do you mean in the same profession as I'm in?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: I mean in general, equal pay for work of equal value.

Ms. Gladys Hayward Williams: Anyone who is employed in the profession that I am in is paid at the same scale rate. If it is—I'm going to guess—a security guard, whether they are male, female, aboriginal, or whatever, they would be paid according to their scale, so would they have pay equity within that? I would think. I'm not sure I understand the question beyond that. It's difficult for me to understand your question.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Who achieved pay equity for you? How did your group achieve pay equity? Have you any idea?

Ms. Gladys Hayward Williams: I think it was just there. If you are a physiotherapist in a certain area, under the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, you are paid according to that pay scale, and it's the same thing with the nurses, and it's right across...within that regional health authority.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Do you have any experiences with marginalized women? Do you have any direct contact? Do you work with marginalized women in any way?

Ms. Gladys Hayward Williams: Those are two different questions. Do I know any? Yes. It's more on a friend type of a basis, a social basis. You hear of these things; you know of these things. Also through the media, yes, you hear of these things and you know of these things. Of course, we are also trained to be watchful in our profession and to be very sensitive to patients, male and female, who may have had various issues of abuse.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Okay, thank you.

Ms. Wachniak, you made reference to having talked to 43 women, and then you made reference to your position in society. Is your position typical of Canadian women? Are you typical?

• (1720)

Mrs. Doraine Wachniak: Position, as in financial?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Well, you made reference to "position", so I'm asking you.

Mrs. Doraine Wachniak: I'm an animal health technologist by trade, and I'm married currently. I have two children. I would say that I've been through poverty and have worked my way up with my husband, and we are now in a very comfortable financial situation, if that's what you're asking.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: And are you typical?

Mrs. Doraine Wachniak: I'm not in an elite group at all. I would say we're maybe a little less than middle class.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Okay.

Now, you asked a question about violence against women. You're quite concerned that after all of these years we still have the problem of violence against women. It's very real, and we know from the coroners' reports; we know from the news reports. In my city, four women have been murdered in the last few months by violent males, partners. In one case a father killed his two daughters.

Are you aware of CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women? It's a UN convention that Canada has signed on to.

Mrs. Doraine Wachniak: I'm sorry. I know of the United Nations, and I know they do work and have mandates or goals that they have countries wishing to meet and reach, but CEDAW, particularly—

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: The United Nations has condemned Canada for not living up to its obligations to women, all Canadian women, including aboriginal women, disabled women, visible minority women. And in that convention, the condemnation had to do with the fact that we have done very little to address violence against women.

Should we not be pursuing and trying to live up to our obligations under that UN convention?

Mrs. Doraine Wachniak: I think you are. You haven't eliminated that funding. Isn't that right? Isn't that what you're continuing to do with this? Is there nowhere that this mandate allows for those kinds of programs to continue, and that kind of—?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: As a country, as a government, we've failed, and women's equity groups and equality-seeking groups are seeking to address that. So there is a bit of a gulf in terms of what we aspire to and what we've actually achieved.

I have a question for Louise.

I know you work for the sexual assault centre, and I'm wondering about the impact of changing the mandate of the Status of Women Canada in terms of your organization and the changes in terms of eligibility criteria.

Ms. Louise Pitre: We are a grassroots organization, and thankfully we are incorporated, so quite possibly we could access some funding. However, we will have to compete with for-profit

organizations that may or may not have an equality agenda. And based on what I'm hearing today, I'm pretty sure those for-profit organizations that have consultants to write proposals and access the material on the Internet are going to have more success at getting funding than my organization.

What I'd like to add is that there is a need for direct service, but the direct service isn't going to do anything about women's equality, and that's what the women's program used to do. It did something about advancing women's equality.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: I have one more question, Madam Chair. I would like to address it to Ms. Byers.

The minister, on December 6, said that all the savings being set aside for reinvestment—and she's talking about the \$5 million—would go into directly supporting Canadian women.

You made reference to the government's internal capacity to achieve women's equality. Why is it so essential for governments to play an active role in women's equality? Why do they need to be there?

Ms. Barbara Byers: Because women do hold up half the sky; we are half of our population, and it's important that governments do that. It's important, for example, that governments do something about pay equity. And I think it's important in this forum especially that we clarify that there's a difference between equal pay for equal work, which is being paid the same for the same job; equal pay for similar work, which is equal pay for jobs that are roughly similar; and equal pay for work of equal value, or pay equity. That's what the task of this generation of women is, to make sure we achieve that.

Governments have to be responsible for women's equality, and we don't have it yet. Yes, we are equal, obviously. You're not going to find anyone around this room, a woman, who would say she's not equal, or a man who would dare say that we're not equal. But the reality is we still face discrimination at work, in our community, in Parliament, wherever we go. We still have violence in huge numbers. We don't have economic and social equality. That's why governments are here—to make sure that all citizens are treated equally.

● (1725)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have run out of time.

I thank the questioners very much for their questions, but I thank the presenters very much for taking time out of their daily lives to come and share their opinions. That's why we have a committee, to listen to all of the people's opinions. That's what makes Canada strong. So to all of you, thank you for taking the time. I wish you all a very Merry Christmas on behalf of the committee. We look forward to doing more work in 2007, the year to come.

I'll move adjournment.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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