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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.)): Members of the committee, I'd like to start.

We have two sets of witnesses. They are here and have made an effort to come here, and we would like to show them that we are very appreciative.

Our normal routine is that the first round goes seven minutes, but with agreement from everyone, I propose that we go for five minutes, so that we'll all have second rounds.

Then the witnesses will have a chance to wrap up with a minute each. We're working on a very tight schedule.

Today we have with us Ardith Toogood, from the Canadian Federation of University Women,

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Goulet, Director of the Conseil d'intervention pour l'accès des femmes au travail,

[English]

and Brenda Murphy, from the Urban Core Support Network.

Each of you has five minutes to present. I will be very strict on the time.

We can start with Ardith.

Ms. Ardith Toogood (President, Canadian Federation of University Women): The Canadian Federation of University Women welcomes the opportunity to present its views. We have grave concerns about women's equality in Canada.

As a non-partisan and self-funded organization of 10,000 women graduates from all provinces, we advocate for human rights, justice, peace, education, the environment, and the status of women and girls.

As an NGO, we have special consultative status at the UN and UNESCO.

CFUW is one of 82 national affiliates of the International Federation of University Women. Why is CFUW concerned about women's equality in Canada? I think we can all agree that women's equality is a human right, that our Charter of Rights and Freedoms proclaims that right, and that the issue of women's equality transcends party politics.

The question is, have women in Canada achieved equality? Our current government states that they have and has forbidden government-funded women's groups to advocate on behalf of women's rights.

Let's take a look at one aspect of women's rights: pay equity. CFUW began advocating for pay equity in 1922. Where are we now? In 2007 Canadian women earn on average around 72¢ for every dollar earned by men, while post-secondary-educated women fare even worse, as do disadvantaged women. This economic setback follows a woman throughout her life.

Are Canadian women to accept their lot as economic inferiors? Are they to happily silence their desire for equality? That seems to be the message we got last fall. Well, we think not. As Geraldine Ferraro declared, "We have chosen the path to equality; don't let them turn us around."

CFUW began advocating for the restoration of the court challenges program in 1992. It was restored, but where are we now? In 2006 the government once again removed funded access to the courts from the disadvantaged whose charter rights may be violated. Everyone deserves justice.

By removing equality from the Status of Women mandate, the government washes its hands of its responsibility to strive for equality rights. Status of Women must hold central oversight for gender analysis and provide accountability to the women of Canada by ensuring gender equality is a priority in our society.

The ban on funding for research and advocacy silences the voices of funded women's groups that provide top-notch research on equality issues, research that CFUW benefits from and values. A democratic government listens to research-based findings. Otherwise, how can it design programs that are relevant and necessary to address the systemic roots of inequality?

Closing 12 of 16 offices and dismissing half the workforce weakens the regional effectiveness of Status of Women Canada, destroys many community networks, and limits women's access to health and advice.

Canada's commitments to CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, Beijing Plus 5 and Plus 10, and the MDGs map out a path, for social justice. Our international federation's affiliates are expressing dismay about Canada's current disregard for women's concerns—the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Croatia, Georgia, Turkey, and Rwanda. Women in the international community look to Canada for progressive public policy. CFUW urges the restoration of equality to the mandate of Status of Women Canada, the reinstatement of the former funding guidelines, and restoration of cut programs and regional offices. Canada should be a world leader in women's equality.

Thank you.

• (1535)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Toogood.

Madame Goulet.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Goulet (Director, Conseil d'intervention pour l'accès des femmes au travail): Good afternoon, everyone.

I would like to begin by thanking the members of the Standing Committee of the House of Commons on the Status of Women for the invitation to appear.

It is very important for us to come before you to talk about the repercussions for our organization of recent changes at Status of Women Canada. In that respect, we support the actions of the Special Coalition for Women's Equality and Human Rights, established last year to denounce both the cuts and the current changes. The Conseil d'intervention pour l'accès des femmes au travail, or CIAFT, also met with the Minister of Transport, the Hon. Lawrence Cannon, last September, and the Minister of Labour, the Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn, last November, to make them aware that these changes are unacceptable. Both ministers seemed very attentive and promised to make representations to their Cabinet colleague who is responsible for Status of Women, with a view to having her quickly reverse her decisions.

In my brief opening statement, I would like to make you aware of some of the gains made by the CIAFT in recent years as a result of funding from the Women's Program and the support of Status of Women Canada in Quebec; following that, I would like to describe the disastrous consequences these changes will have for our particular organization as early as April.

What is the CIAFT? The Conseil d'intervention pour l'accès des femmes au travail has been around for some 25 years. It is the primary group advocating for the women of Quebec's collective right to work. Our members are located in every region of Quebec and, for the most part, are women's employability organizations. Economists, experts on regional development, as well as professional guidance and vocational counsellors are also members of our organization. We focus our efforts in four main areas: the development of the female labour force; pay equity and employment equity; regional development; and, social programs related to family-work balance and the right to work of vulnerable women workers.

We are considered by the Government of Quebec to be a full-fledged labour market partner. Indeed, the CIAFT has been a

member of Emploi-Québec's Comité avisier Femmes en développement de la main-d'oeuvre since 1998, and oversaw the implementation of an intervention strategy for the female labour force. We were also the voice of the Coalition en faveur de l'équité salariale, which spearheaded the adoption of Quebec's pay equity legislation in 1996 and, ever since, we have been closely following the way in which the legislation is being enforced. We also act as a spokesperson with the Francophone and Anglophone media in Quebec on these particular subjects, such as work-life balance or women's equality in the workplace, in general.

What gains have we made as a result of the Women's Program in recent years? As an advocacy group, we are supported by the Government of Quebec, through its independent community action support program, as well as by the Women's Program, at the federal level.

We have been a part of many legislative changes and the work carried out by government in recent years. I would like to give you a couple of examples. The first is the improvements to Quebec's labour standards legislation in 2002. We were able to have psychological harassment included in the legislation, as well as additional days of leave for family responsibilities. We took part in consultations on a comprehensive policy relating to work-life balance in Quebec three years ago, and with support from the Women's Program, we were able to develop a platform on that same issue within our organization. We also were part of the effort to defend the universality of child care services. We are part of every and all consultations provided for under the Pay Equity Act, according to the specific timeline it sets out. We take part in developing five-year plans in the 19 regions of Quebec. We have made enormous gains, particularly as regards pay equity. We have been able to secure a business audit program and a working group on vulnerable female workers. We also took part in developing the Quebec parental leave system. So, there are a lot of different initiatives we have been part of.

The repercussions of these changes on our organization's mission will be significant. Indeed, the CIAFT will lose 66 per cent of its advocacy funding, since it will no longer be eligible to receive funds under the Program for this type of policy work.

In fact, we support this Committee's recommendations to restore core funding for women's groups across Canada. I could perhaps come back to this later on.

• (1540)

Do I have any time left?

[*English*]

The Chair: No, Madam, we have the paper, so we'll read it. What we would like every presenter to do is add value to that.

You have one minute to finish.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Goulet: Fine. I don't have any time left? All right.

[*English*]

The Chair: *Oui, merci.*

Ms. Murphy.

Ms. Brenda Murphy (Coordinator, Urban Core Support Network): Thank you very much for the opportunity.

My name is Brenda Murphy, and I am with the Urban Core Support Network in Saint John, New Brunswick.

We're a coalition of individuals who live in poverty, non-profit groups, the faith community, government, and business community representatives, working systemically to reduce poverty in our community.

Our focus is to influence provincial policy-makers by conducting research, policy analysis, and advocacy, based on barriers experienced by low-income women. We also provide a community education role, informed by the voices of our members and marginalized women, with limited forums in which to speak.

The changes in the mandate to Status of Women Canada will have a profound impact on our organization. A key strategy of our work has been to develop and nurture relationships with decision-makers. As a result of those relationships and partnerships, we've seen concrete changes that directly impact low-income women and their ability to participate in society.

Recently a provincial assistant deputy minister in New Brunswick told us how difficult it is for government to gather the same data as community-based organizations, because the relationships of trust between government and women living in poverty are difficult, if not impossible, to cultivate. The provincial Government of New Brunswick readily acknowledges their reliance on equality-seeking groups to help shape policy and practices to address the real needs of many thousands of women in our region whose voices are muted. Taking away our ability to advocate leaves a huge gap.

Women living in poverty, who are trying to survive, make ends meet, and make sure their children have food on the table, are often not in the position either physically or emotionally to travel to Fredericton, Ottawa, or even to an MP's office to discuss their barriers.

One example of where our advocacy is making a difference is a report we've just completed and presented to the province. In short, we're recommending changes to a specific government policy that has been a barrier to women trying to transition from income assistance to employment. We're also recommending a wage supplement to assist low-wage families.

I want to illustrate how these recommendations could make a difference by introducing you to Joanne. She's a single mom who started working in November at a call centre, where the pay is slightly more than minimum wage. She is determined to keep working, even on the days when her shift ends at one o'clock in the morning and she has to walk through the dark streets of Saint John for an hour to get to her home, because there is no bus service and she can't afford a taxi on her salary.

Who is going to speak for Joanne? She is barely able to respond to the demands of her job and her two teenaged children, let alone try to meet with a politician or a decision-maker to state her case and ask for changes that will help her.

In some respects, Joanne has made it. She's participating fully in society through full-time employment. If we're successful in our advocacy efforts for a wage supplement program, Joanne would be able to receive a top-up, and then maybe she could take a taxi home, easing her fear and stress, and adding to the likelihood that she'll stay employed.

I've been asked how the changes affect women on the ground. This is just one of countless stories of women who are fighting to get through each day. Yet despite their challenges, women are involved with our organization because they know we make a difference. It's a safe space where they can share their stories, talk about what will work for them, and then take the next step into training, employment, or other opportunities.

We want to have the ability to continue to work with and for them. To do that, it is critical that we're able to access funding from Status of Women Canada to continue to advocate for changes that will ensure they can fully participate in our society. Because we work at the level of systemic barriers to poverty reduction, we have not been eligible for funding sources that are designed to support direct delivery service. This has meant that Status of Women Canada has been a lifeline for women's equality-seeking organizations.

To close, I also wish to speak to the administrative cuts by acknowledging the invaluable role played by the regional project officers. They have consistently helped our small organization to clarify goals and objectives. They've linked us with complementary organizations elsewhere. They have provided us with technical support in areas such as evaluation. These regional staff members have helped build momentum and continuity and have kept our work firmly entrenched in the realities of Atlantic Canada. Their loss will be catastrophic to us.

Thank you again for the opportunity.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to the first round of questions.

The members of the committee make it interactive, so they may interrupt you if you're not responding to their questions. That will be a polite interruption.

We'll start off with Ms. Redman for five minutes.

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you all for coming. I think you've hit on a lot of topics that I have to tell you very much resonate in my riding of Kitchener Centre.

It seems to me that the rationale for this government's draconian ratcheting back of funding is that it wants value for money spent. Somehow they want to be able to say, we put x dollars in and this is the result we got. My understanding of how many community-based organizations work is that's just not possible.

Brenda, I think you were really eloquent when you pointed out Joanne as somebody who is working but not making enough money to advocate on her own behalf.

I also wanted to touch on the court challenges that artists brought up, because I think the court challenges program is really key. I'm not a regular member of this committee, so I don't know if you've maybe talked about this in the past, but the court challenges program is one that I have great difficulty in seeing not funded.

I know, for instance, that LEAF took on the issue of ESL for new Canadians and the fact that if you were male, ESL was funded by the federal government, because it was assumed men would go out and work, but for the women, it was not funded because it was assumed they would stay home and take care of the family. Yet when you do any community-based research, you see that among new Canadians it's often the people who are at home who are more isolated and who need that kind of outreach and those kinds of services.

That's more of an observation than a question, but I look at these cuts and I wonder who is doing the gender-based analysis of these cuts to tell us how incredibly damaging these are to women. Is there a way to discuss the value for money invested, which is what this government seems to obsess about, in any of your organizations? It seems to me that what we're talking about is an absence of some bad things happening. So to say that we're going to put x millions of dollars in, or we're now going to fund for-profit organizations instead of non-profit ones.... Can any of you quantify in any way what the ramifications are from your organization's perspective?

Ms. Ardith Toogood: Can I go first, Karen?

We think the cuts are really a drop in the bucket when it comes to the whole budget. This department, Status of Women, is one of the departments that receives amongst the lowest budget allocations. The cuts will take us back not just a little bit, but decades.

In the Canadian Federation of University Women, we've been working for 88 years on these issues, and in particular for 30 to 40 years on the issues I mentioned. The ramifications are huge for women, because whenever you have a setback, it's very hard to come back to where you were. We were actually advocating, and have been since the eighties, for a doubling or maybe more than a doubling of Status of Women's budget, and we would like to see a minister at Status of Women with full cabinet status. So in terms of our advocacy, this is a huge step back.

• (1550)

The Chair: You have one more minute left, if you would like to respond, Ms. Murphy.

Ms. Brenda Murphy: I guess I just wanted to say that our organization is the only one in our community that has not been providing direct service. There are many that are providing direct service to women. The need is so great, they don't have the opportunity, the time, or the resources to advocate. So when our office closes down because we no longer have the ability, there isn't

anyone speaking. No one is speaking any longer on behalf of the women I talk to all the time—the Joannes and the other women—because the organizations and agencies providing direct service are just trying to provide service alone and they don't have the ability to do the advocacy.

The Chair: You have half a minute, Ms. Redman, if you want to make any concluding remarks.

Hon. Karen Redman: Could we hear from Nathalie perhaps?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Goulet: I do not claim to speak for all women's groups in Quebec. However, I can tell you that these changes have been very badly received in Quebec. This is the only federal program for women's groups in Quebec, and reaction is extremely negative. We have the feeling that this is an attempt to get rid of national organizations.

Over the years, many local and regional Quebec groups have joined advocacy coalitions, have made representations to government, gained expertise, and so on. My group, which is involved in fostering women's access to employment, as well as other groups involved in every other area relating to women's issues, will all be facing very serious problems.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Deschamps, you have five minutes.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome. It's always a pleasure to have you here and be able to check in with your organizations with respect to all the work you have accomplished thus far. It's sort of along those lines that I would be interested in having you comment.

In your testimony, Ms. Goulet, you talked about all the advancements and gains you have made, as well as the many different committees and commissions you have been part of.

I would like to know what the impact of these cuts will be on your organization.

You also talked about regional development. As you know, of the 16 offices, 12 will be closed. What do these office closures mean to you?

Ms. Nathalie Goulet: The regional offices are extremely important because WP program officers would follow up on our files, both in terms of developing our applications and throughout the follow-up process. It was an extremely important relationship.

As well, there were people at SWC with expertise in women's issues that will no longer be there now. These departmental cuts send a very negative message. We need a strong department to ensure that, within the federal system, women's issues are indeed cross-cutting.

Just as there is a Status of Women Secretariat in Quebec, we need a similar body at the federal level. There also needs to be an independent research program at the federal level. In the same way that we have the Quebec Council on the Status of Women, there needs to be the same kind of organization federally. So, we really need for the entire structure to be maintained, because this is long-cutting work. All of us here can bear witness to that.

So, this will have a disastrous effect. We have been told that an office will remain open in Montreal, with a director who will not even be a regional director, but rather, a program coordinator or officer whose job will be to receive the applications of hundreds of groups in Quebec. It's absolutely unbelievable.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Could I ask Ms. Murphy to comment on this?

[English]

Ms. Brenda Murphy: As I said in my presentation, we're a very small organization. I'm the one staff person and the rest are volunteers—quite a diverse group around our table.

Our project officer has been so helpful in meeting with us when we're trying to think through what our next step might be and what our project might be, clarifying our goals and making sure we're not all over the map. I think sometimes, even as a small group, we think we can change the world. They've been very good in helping us to be very focused and clear, and also in giving us some very good technical advice around evaluation. Those are not things we have expertise in.

What I understand now, even though the office will be located in Moncton, which is very useful for us, is that one staff person is not going to have the time to give to our organization, to provide us with any of that kind of assistance we've had in the past. His or her role is strictly going to be to review the applications, score them, and send them on to Ottawa. I don't think that person even gets to have much of a say in terms of supporting or not supporting that particular proposal. It has quite an impact on us.

• (1555)

Ms. Ardith Toogood: CFUW is a self-funded organization, as I mentioned. But we have 122 clubs in that many cities and towns across the country. Our members work and liaise with women who are in the offices.

I'm getting messages, for example, from Vancouver that the Young Wolves Lodge program is due to be cut on March 31. The program helps aboriginal women, ages 17 to 24, with alcohol and drug recovery.

Those kinds of things impact the CFUW community because the kind of work we do is broad-reaching. When women, young women or older women, work with the staff members—who, by the way, provide excellent services—they form a connection. And you have to have that connection to really reach them, particularly these kinds of young people.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Your time is up.

[English]

Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank the presenters for coming today and giving us their information. It's an honour to have you here. This dialogue is extremely important for everyone around the table.

There are many questions I would like to ask, but I'll start first with pay equity. It's something that this committee and I have long been involved in and concerned about. I have a letter here from 2005 addressed to Ms. Anita Neville, who is still on the committee. She's not present today because I'm sure she has another commitment. Sometimes we have people substitute because we have other commitments.

She was the chair in 2005, and we did a study here on pay equity. The then government said quite clearly:

The Government recognizes the contribution of the Report of the Task Force but after careful review the Government feels that the Report does not provide an adequate blueprint for implementation of pay equity in a broad range of federally-regulated workplaces.

I don't have time to read the whole letter, but I can give you a copy of it. Basically they said they support pay equity, but it needs to be studied again.

Coming to Status of Women, we were very frustrated because we wanted action taken. So when our side of the government came into power we looked at the pay equity issue and thought we could work with the existing legislation, rather than dragging it out for two or three years. The minister put into practice very stringent procedures in workplaces all across this nation to look at pay equity. We're waiting to see what he found out. We're trying to move that forward, because I agree that pay equity definitely needs to be addressed. Certainly the entire Status of Women committee has agreed to that as well.

Looking at the new part of Status of Women, no women's programs have been cut at all. The \$10.8 million is still there, and the \$5 million has been targeted directly for women's programs. I would encourage people to apply for the programs you're talking about, because that money is readily available to you. That \$5 million will be used only for women's issues. The ministers in all portfolios, including Justice, are working in collaboration to ensure that women's issues are addressed.

Have any of you applied for any of the programs that are available right now?

Mrs. Murphy, you were talking about some very interesting programs in your area. Has there been any move to apply for some of that money to assist the women you're working with?

•(1600)

Ms. Brenda Murphy: We're in the process of doing that right now, because funding for the most recent project we're working on ends on Friday. We're not sure if we're going to qualify, because we're not technically providing a direct service.

I just want to reiterate that the change in not being allowed to advocate still has a very significant impact on people in our community—women's voices that have not been heard but have been heard through us. I don't know whether we're going to be eligible. That's our concern.

Mrs. Joy Smith: I hope you will apply, because the research and the advocacy piece can be incorporated within the application itself. I know we've had numerous applications come in, and there are very good things happening right on the ground to help those women and support those organizations. I hope this helps you a little bit.

We've heard from many women that there has been study after study—

The Chair: Ms. Smith, you must wrap it up. You have 20 seconds.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Sorry.

Would you not agree that the action is important to take? We know what the problems are; we need to find solutions to those problems.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Ms. Ardith Toogood: I don't think anybody would disagree that we should be finding solutions to the problem. We're here to try to find solutions, but the solutions aren't just taking x amount of dollars and putting them into a specific group.

Getting at the systemic, underlying causes, the root causes, requires ongoing research. It doesn't require that there's a cutoff at some point.

Yes, the programs need to be there, but the research needs to accompany the programs.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our presenters. I appreciate the expertise that you bring to our committee.

I'm going to ask a direct question, and I wonder if all three of you could answer. It seems to me that women's organizations, women's programs, are being deliberately shut out, that the changes, which have been made, are an effort to silence women, to stop them doing the work they do. Am I cynical? Is that a possibility? I wonder what your reaction to that is.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Goulet: That is certainly a possibility. As far as we are concerned, the changes to the Women's Program mandate are really budget cuts, and nothing less. We are working not only to ensure that we can play a greater role within society—which is the new Program objective—but also to achieve equality between men and women. That is the very reason why our groups are working in the field and providing services directly to women. The CIAFT cannot provide direct services. That is the work carried out by our members and we cannot replace them. They have an organization with engages in policy work. As far as I know—at least, this is what I've been told by officers in Quebec—we are no longer eligible under the current Program.

[*English*]

Ms. Ardith Toogood: It definitely seems as if women's voices are being silenced. CFUW is upset that that is happening. At our urging, one of our presidents, Laura Sabia, formed the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. From that, of course, the Status of Women was born to provide and look after equality. To remove equality from the mandate of the Status of Women is really to destroy the organization as it was intended to be.

•(1605)

Ms. Brenda Murphy: I would say that women's voices will be silenced, because organizations like ours will no longer be able to speak for them.

There is an example in New Brunswick. Two years ago, then Premier Bernard Lord held provincial consultations to talk about social programs in New Brunswick. We were one of only two community-based groups invited to that provincial consultation, because of the credibility we have, because we've been recognized as having the reality of women who live in poverty at our table, because we know their stories, and because we can speak with and on behalf of these women. We're not going to have the ability to do that, even though Ms. Smith indicated we might.

Certainly the application form I've looked at says that we are not allowed to be advocates at the municipal, provincial, or federal government levels, so that effectively silences us and also the women living in poverty in our community.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

I want to ask about the task force on pay equity. I read that 580-page report and found it very comprehensive. I don't think we need to continue studying pay equity; we simply need proactive pay equity.

We've heard that the Conservative government is looking at the possibility of bringing in some changes, that they like the complaints-based legislation, but are willing to tinker with it.

Is the complaints-based, pro pay equity legislation adequate? Should we be looking at proactive pay equity?

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Goulet: Quite recently, the Quebec Pay Equity Commission published its report, some 10 years after the legislation was passed. I invite you to read it, because it is extremely interesting. It is surely available in English. It includes observations regarding the effects of proactive pay equity legislation. Businesses were surveyed on that point and the vast majority — I don't remember the exact figure — stated that without that proactive pay equity legislation, they would never have taken such measures.

The current federal government is proposing business inspections, even though pay equity can never be achieved by inspecting pay systems. That involves a process with concrete steps. However, proactive legislation is needed to achieve that. In Quebec, we are now demanding that pay equity be maintained. It is absolutely essential for there to be an independent organization, such as the Quebec Pay Equity Commission, to closely monitor enforcement. Just because pay equity is applied once doesn't mean that it will be applied permanently. We are currently demanding that pay equity be maintained. We are also encouraging half the businesses in Quebec who have not enforced it to do so.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to the second round.

Mr. Bagnell, you have five minutes.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you for coming.

I'm going to ask three questions. If you could write them down, then I'd like to get an answer from each of you on any of the questions you'd like to answer.

Regarding the first question, we've been fighting for months to get this put back. It's motherhood; obviously you should have equality, but that message isn't getting across. So I'm wondering if you could help us with any examples.

Your example of Joanne was perfect. But examples of how the money that's being cut really affects particular women...the government is saying it's just administrative and not having a real effect.

Regarding the second question, a lot of your organizations involve volunteers, and as you said, with this tiny cut of money, we're actually losing a lot more money because of the value of volunteers. They contribute \$2 billion annually to the GDP in this country. Could you please comment on the fact that with this tiny bit of money, a lot more value is lost with the volunteers we're losing? In fact, they cut volunteerism too, but we won't get into that.

Regarding my third question, in this centuries-long struggle that women have had for equality, your champion in Parliament was the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women. I'd like to know if she's been helpful in your struggle.

The Chair: Ms. Murphy, do you want to go first?

Ms. Brenda Murphy: I can speak to the first two questions.

In terms of the real effect this change will have on women, I can share another story about Sally, who is currently living in second-stage housing. She's been there for more than a year, which is more than what's typically allowed, because she receives \$490 a month in income assistance. That's the total income for the month in New Brunswick. She has to find subsidized housing, but she hasn't been able to find it. In looking at her limited options right now, one of them is to go back to her abusive partner, because there just isn't enough housing.

Something else we've done in our community is try to advocate for more subsidized housing and bring these stories to people, so they understand the situation that women such as Sally face, in thinking about going back to the abuse because her options are so limited.

In terms of volunteers, on our last 18-month project, we estimated that volunteer time—I don't have the exact number with me—was somewhere in the vicinity of \$70,000 or \$80,000.

You're right, this makes a difference that's also lost if our organization has to close its doors.

• (1610)

Ms. Ardith Toogood: We first met with the minister on October 3. Ten organizations were invited. Our organization of 10,000 women had to be represented by somebody who was also representing the National Council of Women—so two self-funded groups. At that meeting, the minister said that women already have equality. We beg to differ.

Since then, we have not really had contact with her. I've had one letter in response to a letter I wrote.

As far as the Prime Minister is concerned, my response from him was deleted without being read, and the hard copy version has received no acknowledgement whatsoever—and that was on the court challenges program.

Our organization is made up of almost 10,000 volunteers. We've been working for so long; we're upset about all the cuts—not just those about equality, but there are so many cuts affecting the equality of women that it's really quite astonishing. The amount of advocacy that our organization has had to do this fall has been absolutely unprecedented.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Goulet, you have the floor.

Ms. Nathalie Goulet: I talked about direct budget cuts representing 66 per cent of our organization's core funding.

We received about \$75,000 annually, per initiative, under the Women's Program. I could table with the Committee a list of what we have done in the last two years.

We spearheaded a campaign, as part of the tenth anniversary of the Quebec Pay Equity Act. Furthermore, we developed a feminist platform on balancing family and work, as well as three tools—one for women's groups, one for workers, and one for businesses—based on that platform. Through our pay equity campaign, we reached some 1,000 community groups all across Quebec. All of these activities were funded under the Women's Program, but we will no longer be in a position to do that, since this is policy work.

Indeed, I would just like to add that even equality rights are evolving. Ten years ago, there was no proactive legislation on pay equity in Quebec. Our laws are also changing. Women's equality rights are evolving and have steadily improved through the work of groups such as ours.

Legal experts now don't even talk about equality in law. They talk about equality in fact. Indeed, the name of the new policy on the status of women that was just passed in Quebec is: "Making equality in law equality in fact". So, equality must be substantive, it must be real, and we must be able to measure it. As a result, legal experts who follow women's issues no longer even refer to equality in law.

[English]

The Chair: Merci.

Mr. Stanton, five minutes.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our panellists for coming in here to share your insights and represent your organizations this afternoon.

I have a couple of questions, and I'll try to ask them as quickly as I can. If you could keep your answers relatively succinct, I would appreciate it.

Ms. Toogood, with regard to your organization, you say you're self-funded. Does the federation currently receive funds...or did it prior to this time receive funds from Status of Women Canada for advocacy?

•(1615)

Ms. Ardith Toogood: No, it did not. We applied in the eighties, I think around 1986, for a grant. It was a one-time project grant for a workshop and a manual. I have to say that we've updated and are still using the manual.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: It was a program, or a project...

Ms. Ardith Toogood: It was a project, yes. We've been totally self-funded since our founding in 1919.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: So your advocacy efforts effectively are supported by your members and—

Ms. Ardith Toogood: That's right.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Okay. I appreciate that.

You mentioned earlier in your remarks the need for research. I must say that I wholeheartedly agree.

I note that in the new terms and conditions for Status of Women Canada, or for the women's program, the costs of research and polling activities, when they are tied to a project that results in an

outcome that directly improves the situation for women, are in fact eligible.

Are you aware of that?

Ms. Ardith Toogood: They're eligible for...?

Mr. Bruce Stanton: They're eligible under the women's program. Projects or proposals that are brought forward to do with any research polling, when those activities are tied to the project or the outcomes that are envisioned by the project...

You're aware of that?

Ms. Ardith Toogood: Yes.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Good. I'll move on. Thank you, Ms. Toogood.

One common theme we've heard through the course of the testimony here is that time and time again—and again today—we hear very compelling examples of vulnerable women, women's groups, visible minorities, immigrant women, and senior women who are experiencing needs in their own communities. We have heard from you today that your role is to provide a voice, to be an advocate, and so on.

That said, I'm running into a bit of disconnect here. The way in which the terms and conditions are set now is that it is specifically to get practical, concrete programs that would help those same vulnerable women who have those needs to get a step up—getting involved in entrepreneurship, say, or the kinds of opportunities that will actually lift them from that situation and improve their lives.

But the disconnect here involves how an advocacy group that is a voice, that talks about rights...and I take nothing away from that, by the way. That's an important role. I'm just saying that when it comes to public funds, wouldn't it be better to have public funds spent on the programs and concrete remedies that will actually help women and improve their lives directly, and at the same time allow organizations that engage in advocacy to continue to do their work, getting the funds they need to do that from the sources that agreeably, as you pointed out, are available out there for that? So in terms of public expenditure, let's put it where the needs are most.

Would you have a comment on that, Ms. Murphy? I notice you had some very good examples. From what I can see, these programs would help.

Ms. Brenda Murphy: I think you already are doing that in the transfers to the provinces. You are giving us money that then does go to direct funding for services.

What has been so useful for our organization from Status of Women Canada is that we've not been able to apply to traditional sources of funding—foundations, for instance, and even the provincial government—because we were not providing a direct service, and those are typically funding sources that want you to do that.

Status of Women Canada was very clear: we won't fund you if you're providing a direct service, because we want you to try to work to change systems that are going to benefit women ultimately.

That worked very well for us, because we can't access funding from other sources. Approximately 60% of our funding comes from Status of Women Canada, so that's a pretty big piece for us.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: On that point, could you take the 40% you're getting that's not from Status of Women Canada and use that for your advocacy work—

Ms. Brenda Murphy: Well, the 40% does not translate—

Mr. Bruce Stanton: —and then direct the other 60% into programs that actually make a difference? Or no, I shouldn't say make a difference; programs that are actually directed at...I mean, concrete results in the community.

Ms. Brenda Murphy: The 40% does not translate into cash. A lot of that is in-kind service too.

The Chair: I'll give you 10 seconds to finish off your sentence.

Ms. Brenda Murphy: So it's not always cash. We don't get a lot of money. Most of it is the volunteer hours and free rent, that kind of thing. The funding from Status of Women is really what made the difference for us.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much, ladies, for being here today. You make an invaluable contribution to the work of this Committee, in terms of the decisions we have to make as a group.

Ms. Goulet—and this also applies to Ms. Murphy—you have told us quite clearly that we are in the process of killing your organization, that it won't have enough funding to survive. The Minister claims to want to provide direct services, which is a provincial responsibility, rather than transferring funds to the provinces and giving the money to organizations involved in advocacy.

My impression is this: rather than agreeing to question policies that help to keep people living in poverty, that sustain violence, and so on, the government prefers to silence people, so that they can no longer talk about that violence or the poverty that is a fact a life for them.

In terms of direct services, we are really talking about the minimal conditions offered women to allow them to cope. We're not talking about services that will help them to develop.

What are your views?

• (1620)

Ms. Nathalie Goulet: In fact, there is no inconsistency between policy work and services provided on the ground. Our members are funded by Employment Quebec and the Ministry of Health and Social Services. I believe we have made very specific gains. Through our work, we now have a parental leave system which is more generous and includes paternity leave. We have worked with the Pay Equity Commission to set up a working group on vulnerable, non-unionized women workers. This is an issue that the CIAFT has been working on for years now. All of this so-called policy work or lobbying yields very concrete results.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Ms. Murphy.

[*English*]

Ms. Brenda Murphy: I just want to say that I'm not against direct service, and I think we need to have direct service to women. But there are organizations, funding bodies, and governments that are providing direct services. If we continue to just do that and not change systems, then it's the upstream thing. There are still more people who we have to take into the hospital as opposed to fixing it up upstream, so.... I've lost my train of thought, sorry.

I just need to say I'm not against direct service, but there are agencies and bodies out there providing funding for that. We still need to change the systems that are not working for people.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Ms. Toogood.

[*English*]

Ms. Ardith Toogood: We definitely need the programs that fund advocacy and research. It's absolutely vital. The CFUW benefits from that research. When you have volunteers out there, there just isn't the money for us to get that kind of research. We need it; we need it to continue.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: How would you go about getting the message across to the Minister that we have not achieved equality? What do you suggest that we do to bring that home to her?

Ms. Nathalie Goulet: We are suggesting the following four measures: that the Minister immediately restore Status of Women Canada's budget; that regional offices be re-opened and that the responsibilities of the current team be restored; that the primary mission of the Women's Program, which is the achievement of equality between men and women, be restored and that the emphasis be placed on equality in fact; and that the Minister implement the recommendations of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women with respect to the funding of the Women's Program.

[*English*]

The Chair: There's one more minute, if anybody else wants to respond.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: But that will not drive home the message that we have yet to achieve equality. I am wondering how we can get that message across.

Ms. Nathalie Goulet: We have done a great deal of research in recent years. In Quebec, the Women's Labour Development Advisory Committee has done some research, and the most recent statistics show that in some categories, we are moving towards equality.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Could you make that available to us, Ms. Goulet?

Ms. Nathalie Goulet: I believe we already have.

Ms. Nicole Demers: If people don't believe in achieving equality, nor do they believe in the importance of programs and advocacy groups that challenge the *status quo*, we will never be successful in resolving the conflict.

Ms. Nathalie Goulet: She could also read the new Quebec policy that sets out 63 specific steps and five major policy thrusts, 10 of which deal with the economic autonomy and equality of women.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Could you send a copy of that to Committee members and to the Minister?

The Chair: Thank you very much.

• (1625)

[English]

We will now go to Madam Mathysen.

You have five more minutes, and this is the last question.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you very much. I'll try to make it count, Madam Chair.

We've heard a great deal about the cuts and the changes to the mandate of Status of Women.

Madam Toogood, you made a reference to being concerned about all the other cuts. And certainly when they happened in October, many of us were profoundly concerned.

I wonder if all of you could comment on the effects of that combination of cuts in terms of the reality of women, the equality of women, and the future of women in this country.

Ms. Ardith Toogood: It's hard to know where to begin because there have been so many cuts. I think one that is of huge significance is the whole child care issue and the fact that we don't have a pan-Canadian child care system.

There are the cuts to adult literacy, which again tie in with a person's economic possibilities—it doesn't matter if it's women or men. We know that people who can read and do well will earn more and will contribute more to the economy.

The cuts to the volunteer program.... It just goes on and on, and it all has an effect.

Ms. Brenda Murphy: Perhaps I could just speak to the cuts to the literacy program. I find it interesting that the new mandate for Status of Women Canada is to assist women so that they can fully participate in society, but if they're not able to read and write, it's very difficult to do that.

On the one hand, programs were cut that assist women so that they can fully participate in society, and then on the other hand, there's a program saying, "We want you to do something to help them". There were two messages, I guess, that were being sent.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: The poverty that women face, particularly young women raising children, is compounded by these cuts, by this false economy we keep hearing about from the other side.

The issue of a national housing program, the lack of affordable housing, the fact that affordable housing has dried up in communities across Canada is of profound concern. I wonder, in terms of your individual experience, if you could comment on my favourite concern, and that is the need for a national housing program.

Ms. Ardith Toogood: We've had a policy on homelessness and housing for a long time. It's of great concern. It just ties in with the whole economic situation of women. It ties in with the lack of opportunity they have and the lack of advancement because of that. So yes, it's a huge concern.

Ms. Brenda Murphy: I'm also on the National Working Group on Women and Housing. Certainly we would like to see a national housing strategy.

We'd also like to see a strategy that addresses the specific needs of women living in poverty, because women leaving abusive situations and so on need housing that may be more unique than just the average person. We don't see that in Canada and we need to have that. It's quite critical, I think.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: We keep hearing over and over again from the minister and from this government that women have achieved equality. You made reference to the lack of opportunity, the lack of economic equity.

In terms of this committee, what advice can you give us in terms of our priorities? What should we do so that women no longer are faced with the choice between staying in an abusive home or escaping and having the ability to live a life that's filled with joy instead of fear?

Ms. Ardith Toogood: I think the very first thing you have to do is make sure that equality gets back into the mandate of Status of Women, to strengthen it, because it really is the essence of that program. That, I would say, is number one.

Number two is to keep supporting the groups, through the women's program, that look into these programs we're talking about, to look into what's going on underneath, because what's happening now is the social fabric that was holding up society is being slashed and people are falling through. It becomes very difficult to go down there and try to haul them back up again. What we need to do is sew up the rips instead of making more, and that elevates a society.

Those would be my two priorities.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would like to thank the panel for coming in and giving us of your time and your knowledge. I'm sorry that these things are so short, but we have another panel after you. What I'd like to do is give you each one minute for wrap-up.

[Translation]

Ms. Goulet.

Ms. Nathalie Goulet: I referred earlier to the four priority demands we had passed on to the Minister, and now I would like to speak straight from the heart.

Our organization will be celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, and yet, it is in a climate of tremendous uncertainty that we approach our work in the coming years. At the same time, we are in great demand by our provincial government, which is encouraging to continue to play an active role in issues related to women's economic independence and equality.

We will no longer be able to do that, however, because our organization, our projects and our policy work no longer jibe with the Program's objectives. This is a very serious and deep concern for us. In Quebec, within the women's movement, our group is the only one that is involved in labour-related issues. So, it's very serious.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Ms. Toogood.

Ms. Ardith Toogood: I think it is very important for all of you to keep the issue hot in the House. If the issue is kept suppressed and the grassroots out there are not getting the message, either through the media or through you, it will die. So it's very important. You all have a role to play to make this happen. We're talking about 52% of the population here, not small potatoes.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Murphy.

Ms. Brenda Murphy: I would just ask that you strongly urge the government to go back to including women's equality in the mandate of the Status of Women to allow groups to receive funding and continue to advocate for changes so that women can fully participate in society in our country.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you to the panel again, and have a safe journey home.

Members of the committee, the meeting is adjourned for two minutes while the panel changes over and the clerks finish doing what they have to do.

• _____ (Pause) _____

•

• (1635)

The Chair: Ladies and gentlemen, members of the committee, we have three panellists, one of whom has come from Yukon. I'd like to acknowledge that; it took her three days to get here.

Thank you so much. You must be really dedicated to be here.

Unfortunately, I'll stick with the rule that it's five minutes for each presentation.

I'd like you to know that we have your briefs, so if you want to add value by adding what you think, that should be more than what you've given us. That would be better, and it will allow you more interaction with the members of the committee.

Members of the committee, we're going to stick with five minutes, so that each party gets two rounds. That will be fair.

We have votes at 5:45, so we will be on a tight schedule.

Ms. Hrenchuk, would you like to start?

Ms. Charlotte Hrenchuk (Coordinator, Yukon Status of Women Council): Thank you.

It took me only one day to get here, not three. It felt like three, though, with the time changes.

First of all, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to present the views of Yukon women to your committee. It is not often that Yukon women have a chance to participate directly in national consultations. I'm here on behalf of my organization, the Yukon Status of Women Council, which is a small non-profit, and my sister organizations in the Yukon.

The situation of women's lives north of 60 is a world apart from life in the south—economically, socially, and culturally. Isolation, a harsh climate, lack of resources, the high cost of living, a high rate of social issues, limited opportunities for employment, and the legacy of residential schools and colonization affect all aspects of all women's lives, first nation and non-first nation.

Twenty-three percent of our population is aboriginal, compared to 3.3% for Canada. In the other territories, this number is much higher. The legacy of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of aboriginal women, as well as cultural alienation and lack of respect, is greater in the north. Consequently, rates of spousal abuse, homicide, and sexual assault are higher for aboriginal women. As well, aboriginal women live with inequities under the Indian Act. This is not equality.

Yukon women are 2.9 times more likely to experience sexual abuse and are more likely to be killed by a spouse. The income gap is widening, with single mothers the most affected. Poverty in the Yukon is increasing. More women and children are accessing soup kitchens and emergency food banks. We don't even have a regular food bank. Women and children's homelessness is on the rise in our hostile environment. This is not equality.

The Yukon Status of Women provides a voice for Yukon women. We raise issues and form coalitions to act on behalf of women. We have the ability to speak to and represent women's issues. We provide data and information as well as policy analysis to other organizations and governments. The Yukon Status of Women Council has just completed a pan-territorial participatory research project on women's homelessness in the north in conjunction with colleagues in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

No such research had been conducted to date. Homeless women, the most marginalized in our society, told me this was the first time anyone sought their stories and gave credence to their experiences. They asked us to work for changes to the determinants that keep them trapped in cycles of poverty and homelessness. They asked us to make their voices heard and help them create change.

In order to do this, we need data. We need to be able to do research. There is very little data available on the north. The north is consistently left out of national studies. We are told that our numbers are so low that we have little statistical significance. We don't count. Then we are told that we have no data to support the need for more women's shelters, for low-income housing, for training programs, or for changes to public policy that would put more resources in women's pockets or give tenants some rights.

So we need to be able to conduct research locally using local researchers, but Status of Women Canada will no longer fund independent research. Sending southern researchers north is costly and inefficient and ineffective. They do not know the issues, the people, and the history. The message northern women are hearing is that the government no longer wants to fund research because they don't want to know about the inequities of our lives.

Policy work creates positive change for women. The Yukon Status of Women Council worked with local women's organizations and the Yukon Housing Corporation to create a priority housing policy for women fleeing abusive relationships. That means women and children now have an option other than returning to their abuser. This is making a real difference in Yukon women's lives.

Our work on raising social assistance rates will make a real difference in the choice many women face daily of paying the rent or feeding their children.

• (1640)

The cuts to the administrative budget will affect us drastically. We have a longstanding relationship with the Vancouver office. They understand our realities and have consistently given timely assistance.

Continuity and history will be lost, and we will have to compete with the Northwest Territories, the prairie provinces, and British Columbia for the scarce resource of program officers' time and assistance.

The website is not a friendly tool for women living in Beaver Creek, or those without a computer, of whom there are many in the north.

Regional representation is important; witness the parliamentary system. Centralization further isolates and marginalizes northern women. Yukon women are few in number, and they are a varied population with huge problems and high needs.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll have to stop you because otherwise others won't get time. You will have an opportunity in questions and answers and in the wrap-up comments.

Ms. Watson, you have five minutes.

Ms. Gail Watson (Coordinator, Women's Health Clinic): Thank you very much for the opportunity to present our views here today.

I'm with the Women's Health Clinic. It's a non-profit community health centre in Winnipeg that's based on the principles of feminism, equity, and diversity.

Since April 2001, the Women's Health Clinic has benefited from Status of Women Canada funding for an educational and policy change project that was aimed at decreasing income inequities by educating the public about the impact income inequities and social exclusion have on women's health. This project has been very successful in making changes that would not have been possible without the ability to do research, to advocate, to lobby for policy change, and to build the capacity of low-income women.

Let me specifically address some of these proposed changes.

First I'll speak on the need for research. A research report for this project was the basic foundation that started the project. Poverty is hazardous to women's health. The research showed that poverty was in fact hazardous to women's health, and it validated why society needs to consider policy change to reduce poverty if we wish to reduce health care costs. The educational and media efforts utilized the research information to inform the general public of the impact of poverty on health care budgets and to advocate, to government, for specific policy changes.

The ability to use Status of Women funding to do research on issues of significance to women and to develop advocacy and public education programs based on the evidence is critical. Research informs society on emerging issues, and it's necessary in the development of public policy.

Second is the need to advocate for women's equality. At every age and stage of life, we know there are more poor women than there are poor men. The link between poverty, social exclusion, low income, and health status, plus the increasing feminization of poverty, highlights the failure of public policy to take women into account. The ability to use Status of Women funding to lobby and advocate for policy change is essential.

Here is an example of some of the advocacy we've done. Because the majority of minimum wage earners in Manitoba are women, we founded the Minimum Wage Coalition. Since 2002 we have presented briefs and petitions and have held rallies to support an increase in the minimum wage. Due to the efforts of the coalition, the minimum wage in Manitoba increased. It was at \$6.50 per hour when we started, and by April 2007 it's going to go to \$8. That took a lot of effort in the advocacy and policy change arena.

Other outcomes of the advocacy efforts include the elimination in Manitoba of the child tax benefit clawback, a housing benefit provided to disabled individuals, and some gender analysis done in the provincial budget process. We've seen an increase in child care spaces, and we have a provincial commitment to review child care subsidy levels. And there are efforts to improve housing for low-income families.

Finally, there is the need to build the capacity of women. Women who experience poverty and inequality rarely have any opportunity to participate in shaping the programs or policies that affect and influence their lives. Validating their knowledge, experience, and stories, plus involving them in developing the recommendations for policy change, is very powerful, both for the outcomes of the policy change and for their own self-esteem and confidence.

Before I close, I want to address the reduction in the administrative budget of Status of Women Canada. The Women's Health Clinic has appreciated the support of the regional representatives of Status of Women located in Winnipeg and in Edmonton. They have linked us to helpful research and information and to individuals who are working on projects with similar goals in Manitoba and Canada.

• (1645)

This has been most useful to us, and it needs to be recognized as a very valuable component of the success of the Status of Women money.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Thank you for your presentation. I'm sorry, but time is up. Did you want to say a sentence or so?

Ms. Gail Watson: I have one.

The loss of the Winnipeg regional office will certainly negatively affect all women's groups in Manitoba who work with diverse and low-income women.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Thank you very much.

Now I'd like to call on Joni Simpson, who is the director of the Canadian Women's Community Economic Development Council. You have five minutes.

• (1650)

Mrs. Joni Simpson (Director, Canadian Women's Community Economic Development Council): Thank you.

[Translation]

Good afternoon. I would like to begin by thanking you for inviting me to appear today. My name is Joni Simpson and I represent the Canadian Women's Community Economic Development Council.

Community economic development that focuses on women is a way of including women in decision-making and local economic development in order to reduce poverty and improve the living conditions of women, their families, and their community.

We are deeply concerned about the budget cuts affecting Status of Women Canada's programs and administration. These budget cuts will have a direct impact on the survival of many organizations with which we are affiliated. We ourselves have received funding from Status of Women Canada, which allowed us to work together across Canada to improve living conditions for women.

If women-centered organizations such as ours exist, it is because equality between men and women has not yet been achieved. That has been proven through studies and statistics collected by such organizations as the OCDE and the United Nations. If the government continues to deny that fact, the status of women and poverty within our society will continue to worsen, and the hard work carried out by thousands of women and men for years will be lost, as well as past investments made by Status of Women Canada.

Why do women only earn 71 cents for every dollar earned by men? And this, despite the fact that they have a higher level of education, have the ability and are skilled. The fact is, though, that they rarely rise to decision-making levels, especially if they are members of a visible minority. The face of poverty in the world and here in Canada is female. We have only to look at the growth in poverty, whether it be among senior women, aboriginal women, single mothers, immigrant women or visible minority women.

By cutting budgets for women's programs, the government is sending a message that women are not a priority. Why is it important to invest in women's programming? Because we know that when women improve their own living conditions, conditions for their families and children improve. Investing in women is a sustainable, cost-effective investment, because the benefits are significant for society as a whole.

[English]

Status of Women Canada is the only federal agency that focuses on critical economic, social, and cultural issues limiting women's equal participation in Canadian society. An examination of women's daily lives shows continuing disparities between the experiences of women and men in terms of access to affordable housing, employment, and security as seniors. Addressing these gaps has been crucial in the work of Status of Women Canada and the women's organizations it supports.

The women's program's research role is a complement to its grants programs, and research is an essential support to ensuring sustainable development practices. Past research funded by the women's program has translated the experience in individual communities into meaningful policies in support of equality between women and men over the long term. The reduction of funding for this element of Status of Women Canada undercuts its ability to maintain its mandate to assist the Government of Canada in meeting its responsibility to women as equal citizens and adequately responding to women's needs.

The Status of Women's website has an extensive collection of research that helps us to understand why women have not achieved equality in our society. How then can we send a message that equality is achieved and that women's programs are not a priority?

The full participation of women and men in their society is good for all Canadians. Status of Women Canada has made a practical difference to women nationally, provincially, and locally for 30 years. The federal government's financial investment is far outweighed by the socio-economic returns to the community, by the increased participation of women in every aspect of society. Yet, although there have been positive gains, women and men have not yet achieved full equality in Canada.

I'll carry on later.

• (1655)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Thank you, Ms. Simpson.

Of course, you know that during the time that questions are directed to you, you can continue to put your points in.

I want to thank all three of you for doing this.

Now we're going to go to round one of panel number two. Our first question comes from Mr. Bagnell. You have five minutes.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Thank you all for coming. They were excellent presentations and very helpful.

Ms. Hrenchuk, I noticed you didn't finish your presentation. I'd like to share my time and let you finish it.

Ms. Charlotte Hrenchuk: Thank you very much, Mr. Bagnell.

With the new funding guidelines, we are no longer able to access funding to work for systemic changes, to speak out for those who cannot, such as all the homeless women who I personally interviewed, and to raise issues and bring together coalitions to inform politicians about the issues and implications of policies and regulations on women's lives. These changes place Yukon women's organizations in competition over funding, taking time away from valuable work in the search for funding.

What Yukon women are hearing is that the federal government does not want to fund advocacy because they don't want to hear about the inequities in women's lives. Funding resources are extremely scarce in the Yukon. Yukon women's organizations are not operating on a level playing field with those in the south. There are few corporations that are alternate sources of funding. Without a charitable number we are ineligible for funding from charitable foundations, and corporations want a tax receipt.

We do not have access to alternate sources of funding. Homeless women place their trust in our ability to help them by working towards systemic change. Without funding from Status of Women Canada, it looks like that trust will be betrayed.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Could you briefly outline your six recommendations?

Ms. Charlotte Hrenchuk: The first recommendation is to return the word "equality" to the Status of Women Canada's mandate.

The second is to establish a northern Status of Women Canada office in one of the three territories. This would be a more effective and efficient use of tax dollars. It is not effective to attempt to serve a huge geographic area from one southern office that will be stretched beyond capacity.

The third is to re-establish funding for the independent research fund program.

The fourth is to restore funding to the women's program for advocacy activities.

The fifth is to allow non-profit advocacy organizations to obtain a charitable number.

The sixth is to restrict women's program funding to not-for-profit groups. It's just mind-boggling to me how a small organization like mine or Brenda Murphy's can compete with for-profit organizations that have their own economic resources, whereas we have volunteers and that's about it.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Could you speak for a minute, not just for the Yukon, but for the entire three territories, for the northern half of Canada that doesn't have an office, and explain why you need an office there, why you can't be served from the south, why it's different?

Ms. Charlotte Hrenchuk: For all of the reasons I outlined earlier in my presentation, the reality of our lives is very different. We have an enormous geographic area with very small communities. Each of the three territories serves different language groups with different cultural realities as well. It's been difficult enough to be served from the Vancouver office, but to have the whole top half of Canada served probably from two offices is mind-boggling. I don't know how we're going to get any service. I don't even know how they're going to review our project proposals.

As for my colleagues in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, their situations are even more dire than the situation in the Yukon. The Yukon stands relatively well, especially compared to Nunavut. Women's lives there are not equal. They will not be equal for a long time, and they need all the resources, both physical and financial, that can possibly be offered.

The housing situation is just appalling in all three territories. People in the south just don't realize the history and the legacy, particularly of residential schools and colonization, on all of the people across the north. When people don't realize that history, they don't have the same kind of understanding of the problems we have, particularly of women's social issues. Aboriginal women stand on the bottom rung of the ladder. Efforts to help them have to be redoubled. If there was an office in the north that understood our realities and could help diverse women's groups across the north in a more personal way, which is what people need, especially with low literacy levels, that would really help.

• (1700)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Thank you so much, Ms. Hrenchuk.

Madame Demers.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank you for being here today.

We know that, in addition to cutting the Women's Program budget, cutting budgets related to the Status of Women, and changing the ground rules, the government has also eliminated the Court Challenges Program. As well, the government has cut funding for the National Volunteerism Initiative and the Summer Career Placements program.

As members of the Bloc Québécois, we are saying that most of these initiatives are within the jurisdiction of the provinces, and yet, we know that government interference in areas of provincial jurisdiction has caused community organizations to develop certain habits, so that they now require Ottawa's assistance in order to make ends meet.

Will these budget cuts have a significant impact on you, and if so, how? Would you say that women are the primary victims?

Ms. Hrenchuk, I would like you to talk specifically about the Yukon and the abolition of the Court Challenges Program. Many aboriginal women who benefited from this program will no longer be able to do so. How are they reacting to this? Do you believe the government made a mistake when it decided to make these cuts? If you do, do you think there are enough women out there to convince it to change its position, and how exactly can we do that, if there are actually enough of us to make that happen?

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Ms. Hrenchuk.

Ms. Charlotte Hrenchuk: In reference to the court challenges program, we need that court challenges program, particularly in the north, because we are so marginalized. Marginalized women have no other way of gaining access to the courts.

In the Yukon we have one neighbourhood law centre that will do civil challenges, but its funding is about to be cut as well. So there are no other avenues for marginalized women, whether aboriginal or immigrant, of which there's a rising number in the north.

There's no way for poor women to access the courts. They can't afford lawyers. For change to be made and for inequalities to be rectified, women need access to the courts. It's going to have a huge impact.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Ms. Watson.

Ms. Gail Watson: The court challenges program has been an essential one for all diverse groups of women and low-income people, and as has already been commented, without access to that kind of legal intervention, the systemic changes that are necessary are not going to take place.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Excuse me, Ms. Watson. I would like to hear your views on what we can do to encourage the government to change its decision.

Ms. Hrenchuk answered the first part of the question, but, as members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, we need you to help us to get the government to change its mind.

What can we do? How can you help us and how can we help you?

[English]

Ms. Gail Watson: Well, I know many women's groups have rallied in order to show their displeasure. There have been many briefs written. I guess at this point it's time for those who make the policies to have the opportunity to perhaps reconsider. Sometimes the right thing to do is to reconsider.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Madame Simpson.

[Translation]

Mrs. Joni Simpson: First of all, it would be very helpful if there were more women in Parliament or in government. I am very impressed by the number of women who are here today. I am looking over there to see how things worked previously, but one certainly cannot say that we have achieved equality in Parliament. If women had a greater voice there, I would agree that it would be tremendously helpful, but that will not happen overnight.

We have to work together. Women's groups are active on the ground, working with women. We are ready. We left home to come here, missing a day of work today, in order to appear before the Committee because we believe in this, although we cannot do it on our own.

• (1705)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): You have about 30 more seconds if you want to add something.

[Translation]

Mrs. Joni Simpson: I would just like to add that we're not talking about programs aimed at people who have financial means. We deal with the most marginalized people. When programs are abolished, the most marginalized among us become even more isolated and have even less of a voice. All of these programs are very important.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Thank you so much.

We'll go to Ms. Grewal.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all for your time and presentations.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but the Status of Women office is in Vancouver, far from Yukon. So is an officer sitting in an office in Vancouver really any more in touch with the plight of Yukon women than an officer in Edmonton or even Ottawa?

Could you also please specify what kinds of services the regional office provides you with?

Ms. Charlotte Hrenchuk: We've had a longstanding relationship with the B.C.-Yukon office since 1973. That kind of history and continuity is going to be really hard to duplicate from the office in Edmonton. They have made at least one or two trips to Yukon every year to visit every women's organization, so that has helped keep them in the touch. Over the years that has developed the kind of relationship that is helpful. They provide an awful lot of phone consultations that are very helpful, and in a very timely fashion. You may think it's a silly little point, but they are in the same time zone, and that does make a difference to us.

As I said in my recommendations, it would be great if we could have a northern office. That would really address efficiently and effectively the needs of women's organizations in the north. But as I said, we have a longstanding relationship with the B.C.-Yukon office.

That office cares so much that one year, when an aboriginal women's organization that was working on including aboriginal women in the self-government process was going to run out of funding for their program, the program officer gave them the money for that program that she would have spent to come up to Yukon for one of those twice-a-year visits.

So the program manager there cares a lot about women and women's organizations in Yukon, and that has been built up over a long period of time.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: What types of programs do these women need, and have you ever applied for funding for these programs?

Ms. Charlotte Hrenchuk: Yes, we've had funding from Status of Women Canada over the years for a variety of programs. Back in the seventies, women got together. We had no public transportation system. Status of Women Canada gave funds to help create that public transportation system, which started with a group of women.

We've had funding from Status of Women Canada for pay equity programs, for research to give rural women voices, and for programs to help poor women learn advocacy skills so they can advocate for themselves and their sisters within the social service system. There has been a wide variety of programs.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: I am also curious about women and homelessness in the north. How many people are we talking about?

● (1710)

Ms. Charlotte Hrenchuk: It's really hard to say. Because of our harsh climate, most of the homeless women are not absolutely homeless, sleeping on the streets—but some do, at minus 40. Most of the homelessness is relative, which means that women return to their abusive husbands, spouses, or partners. They use what's politely termed “survival sex” in order to survive. They will do almost anything to find a place to sleep when it's minus 40. They're living in abusive households.

In Nunavut, there are three and four families living in two-bedroom homes. As you can imagine, if you put that many people in a small place, the incidence of violence and assaults of all stripes increases.

It's hard to put a number on it, and it varies in each territory. We interviewed service providers for the study, and some said the number was 100, some said it was 500 for Yukon, which is high when you're looking at a population of close to 30,000 people. I interviewed 65 women, which is statistically very high. In the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, particularly Nunavut, the numbers go up.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Our committee has heard from other organizations that the conditions facing—

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Ms. Grewal, I'm sorry, we've run out of time.

Ms. Mathysen, do you have a question?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. In fact, I have a question for each of our presenters.

Ms. Watson, you indicated that in response to the change in mandate, the cuts, many briefs have been written, and women have rallied. What response did you get from the government to these briefs, to this concern?

Ms. Gail Watson: We've had an excellent response. We've had unbelievable outcomes from this project. I guess that's why I'm so concerned about the advocacy issue, because if we're not going to be doing advocacy, we're stuck with what we have. That means that policies aren't going to change in the future and the systemic changes that are needed to improve the lives of low-income women are not going to be made through services. They're going to be made through changes in policy and structures within our system. For example, after the initial research we did, which showed that poverty was hazardous to women's health, the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy now does all their work with a gender analysis, so now people delivering health services can take a look at those reports and know that this is an issue that affects women and men very differently. So even in the allocation of our scarce health funding there are opportunities.

We've had changes in housing policy because of the housing report we did. Taking women along when one lobbies policy-makers and bureaucrats and having them tell their stories makes a huge difference. It's way different from having people like all of us, whom I consider to be people of privilege, putting forth their suggestions. First, there is somebody who has a story to tell and can tell it in a manner that puts reality on the situation.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

Ms. Hrenchuk, you talked about the many projects you have done. Do you believe that the success of the applications you made for those projects was enhanced by the research you did in advance of them?

Ms. Charlotte Hrenchuk: Yes.

Could you reframe that?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: You talked about having received money and support for projects for Yukon women and aboriginal women. You alluded to the fact that they were very successful projects. Were the research and the work you did in advance to convince Status of Women Canada to support those projects important in terms of actually getting that money?

Ms. Charlotte Hrenchuk: Yes, it definitely was. Working with the program officer enables us to think through the process a lot more clearly and enables us to really set priorities, to take a good hard look at what would be the best allocation of resources, given the particular situation at the time. All of that work ahead of time with the program officer helps clarify the whole project and put a really clear analysis on it.

• (1715)

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

Ms. Simpson, we keep hearing from groups that it is essential to restore the word "equality" to the mandate. Why is that so important?

Mrs. Joni Simpson: It has been forgotten, which has turned the problem into something that is invisible. I can speak for my work on the ground. I work in a women's centre on micro-credit and community economic development, and when women go into what we call traditional economic development resources, they aren't well received in all cases. I don't say all of them, but the women we work with come to us and talk about the experiences they have inside of

these organizations where their projects aren't accepted. They basically get refused, and they end up looking for other resources.

There are problems out there, and if we don't talk about equality, we're not looking at the problems. When we're talking about equality, we're naming it. We're not pretending it's not there.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Thank you, Ms. Simpson.

Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Thank you all very much for coming today. I appreciate it.

I have two questions and they're both unrelated. I'll put them out and let you choose how you want to respond.

The first question is this. I'm struck by each of your presentations on the importance of research as a prerequisite to policy development. It's the research that drives the advocacy that drives the change in policy. I'm wondering if any of the three of you would like to expand on that.

My other question, which is not related, is this. You were asked, Ms. Watson, about what you're doing to mobilize women's groups. You talked about presenting briefs and whatever, and the three of you are here today. One of my colleagues speaks eloquently about the fact that the old methods of advocacy are not working any longer. This government is not responding to the traditional manner of advocacy and lobbying. I guess what I'm asking each of you is whether you have developed alternative strategies, either for advocacy on your behalf and on behalf of women or whether you're developing alternative strategies to meet the needs of your organizations and your communities.

Mrs. Joni Simpson: When you mentioned that research drives the advocacy that drives the policy, I'd also say that the research is connected to the women who are doing the work. We know that we need both the research and the policy, but we need to speak to that policy with the women. That's the other component. I'd say there's a third component that needs to be there. To be able to do that, you need to be talking to the right people. I would say that what I've felt in my experiences that have been positive experiences in lobbying would be having the opportunity to speak one on one and feel like you're speaking on the same level.

I'll just touch upon the regional offices for that. I'm in Montreal, and I'm privileged to be in Montreal. I would say that it's so essential to be able to talk to those people in those offices. We're always talking. In the jobs that we're doing it's political all the time. And that's something we've also learned from the work on the ground. We can be providing services and working with women and finding solutions up the yingyang, but if we don't work on the lobbying and the policy side and have the opportunity to sensitize and talk with decision-makers and make the changes, nothing will change and equality won't happen.

So having access to people is so important. And that's where I draw in that regional office piece. It's so important to have people to talk the hard talk with.

• (1720)

Ms. Gail Watson: I just want to add to that. It seems to me that resources are always limited. Without having good information, one then is not using evidence-based decision-making, and primarily that's what we all have to do. We do evidence-based decision-making in the areas that I'm familiar with, in the areas of health care delivery, programs, services, as well as in all policy changes. If one doesn't have that background, others are not going to be listening.

I had the very excellent opportunity to have a strong research report behind the project I've been able to coordinate. Because of that strong basis, regional health authorities in Manitoba have included gender issues in their needs assessment. They have examined gender issues now as to how they deliver programs and services. If that information hadn't been provided, it wouldn't have been something that they would have embraced. With it, they are willing to embrace it, if your foundation of information is solid. So for me that's one of the first things.

The second piece in advocacy is using disenfranchised women's voices to validate the information and then to advocate with you on what the necessary changes are. They know what needs to be done and they know what's needed.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Thank you so much.

Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our second panel for coming and sharing some insights this afternoon for the benefit of our committee.

A question to you, Ms. Simpson, and all of the speakers spoke on this topic, but I'll direct this to Ms. Simpson. On the issue of equality, we've heard extensive testimony about the term and the use of equality, the concern about that word being lost from the terms and conditions. When we speak about equality, do you think this relates to equality of outcome or equality of opportunity?

Mrs. Joni Simpson: I'm sorry, equality of outcome?

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Is it equality of outcome or equality of opportunity? We're talking about equal opportunity, in other words. Which would it be? When we talk in terms of equality, we're trying to achieve...we've heard the term "equality seeking". Are we trying to seek equality of outcome, or are we trying to seek equal opportunity for women?

Mrs. Joni Simpson: I'll just say it in my own words. I say it's about rights.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: I'm not trying to force you into it.

Mrs. Joni Simpson: No. I'd say that equality, for me, is about women having choices, about having access to resources that respond to their specific needs. When we're talking about women who come from a marginalized population, they're further away from those opportunities. Equality for me is that they have access to resources that will respond to those needs to give them more opportunities to become autonomous.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Agreed.

Along this line, when we look at the terms and conditions of the women's program, the terms actually speak to, in the words of the document itself, "the full participation of women in the economic, social and cultural life of Canada". Express in that is it's motivated by the need to break down the barriers to access. And we've heard this in extensive testimony, that the actual cases that are brought, and what's being sought by advocacy and by research and by capacity building...it's all about trying to break down those barriers so that women marginalized by circumstances, whatever they may be in Canada, have access to those.

Wouldn't you say that a program or projects that in fact seek to provide that assistance that will enable community-based groups to fund projects that will actually be directed to those core needs...? Isn't that kind of a project going to help provide that kind of access to break down those barriers?

• (1725)

Mrs. Joni Simpson: You said that community-based groups were going to fund projects?

Mr. Bruce Stanton: No, receive funding. Under the women's program, the idea is that community-based groups will propose projects, for example, pertaining to aboriginal women, immigrant women and visible minorities, senior women. It's all about getting dollars to those women to address those needs, the kinds of issues that they're experiencing, to enable them to break down the barrier, to get a leg up, and to move into a situation where their lives will be improved. Wouldn't that be useful in the context of this discussion?

Mrs. Joni Simpson: I think funding women's organizations, which are community organizations, is very important. It's not only about accessibility to everything out there, because we're not there to marginalize women, but it's also creating solutions that come from women and women's voices. As my neighbour here said, they know what the answers are and it's not always the traditional model that answers to those needs. I think I agree with you, yes, we need to be funding those organizations.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: I was glad to see, in terms of your discussions about research and capacity building, that in the context of these project proposals, capacity building and research and polling are in fact part of that eligibility.

Mrs. Joni Simpson: Research is key, not only to know where we're going, but it's also important for groups to have access to those research pieces to go elsewhere for funding. I'm from an organization that gets funding from several sources, but research is very important.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Thank you so very much for your answer.

We're running into a bit of a quandary. At 5:30 the bells are going to ring, and the members of Parliament are going to have to go into the House to prepare for a vote.

We will be saying goodbye to you at that time, and I don't want you to think that we're rude. We just have to do that.

I want to give our guests a chance to wrap up, to have their last say. We have about five minutes left. I'll give each of our guests two minutes.

So can we have the wrap-up, starting with Ms. Deschamps?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Madam Chair, without taking any time away from someone else, could I be given just 30 seconds?

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Yes, absolutely.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I will be brief because I know that you have all travelled quite a distance to be here and that you are also probably losing a day's work.

You are among the many people who have come to tell us about the urgency of this situation and the importance of maintaining program funding and restoring the Program to its former state. As you know, the Minister's announcements have sent shock waves throughout many organizations. I will leave you on that note. I know that, ultimately, women will once again be penalized. We have been working for 30 years now to help women escape solitude, exclusion and poverty. It's your turn to speak. Please do whatever you can to convince the government to meet your expectations.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Because we're close to the time the bells are going to ring, I'll ask each of you to answer and wrap up at the same time. I'll give each of you a minute, starting with Ms. Hrenchuk.

Thank you.

Ms. Charlotte Hrenchuk: I think we need to remember that equality isn't just individual equality—I'm equal to you and you're equal to me—it's also systemic equality.

I note that in this House there are fewer women on the floor than there were in previous governments. So it's a systemic problem; it's not just an individual woman's problem.

As far as your question on how we can change things, I think that coming here to give witness to the reality of women's lives in the north is the best thing I can possibly do.

If you can bring that information to the House, about individual women who are sleeping out in the cold on the streets of Whitehorse, who don't have access to programs and have asked for our voices to speak for them, because they're too busy looking for a place to live or for food for their children.... We need to be able to speak out on their behalf.

● (1730)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Thank you so much.

Ms. Watson.

Ms. Gail Watson: The changes that I believe will make a difference in the long run are the interrelated issues of income, social status, and gender. There's so much work that still remains to be done for the equality rights of women.

Low-income women's lives are not equal. The barriers are very real. While services and programs are helpful, it's the systems and the policies that need to be addressed.

They know all about charity. We don't need a charity model. We need a model that's going to allow them to improve their lives, using the information and the capacities they have.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Thank you so much, Ms. Watson.

Ms. Simpson.

Mrs. Joni Simpson: We encourage the federal government to reinvest funds, to maintain, and to grow. That means more essential infrastructure to serve all of its citizens.

Ongoing support of the Status of Women Canada is a sound investment that will have significant, positive socio-economic consequences for all Canadians.

I call on all of you present at this committee who believe in the essential right to equality for all Canadians to take more action to reinstate and improve funding for women's groups and the Status of Women.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith): Thank you, Ms. Simpson.

We want to thank all our guests today for coming out to join us. Thank you so much for all your insightful dialogue.

The meeting is adjourned.

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