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**Chair**

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi**

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## Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Thursday, February 22, 2007

• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.)):** Committee members, I would suggest that if you want to leave at 4:30 you'd better settle down.

I'd like to draw to the attention of committee members that the witnesses were given parameters of "senior women" when they were called. The committee is looking at a holistic approach of women generally—economic security of women. Whatever group you represent, whether it's senior women, business women, etc., it will be advantageous for us to hear about it.

I know you've come with a 10-minute presentation. I would suggest you keep your presentation to five minutes so there can be a lot of questions and answers and interaction. That's what you're here for. The committee wants to listen, to ask you questions, and to understand. So if you are not able to get through your presentation, you can leave it for us. We will distribute it to committee members. You don't have to have it in both official languages; we'll do the translation.

Ms. West, I know you've come from New Brunswick, and Ms. Blake, you've come from the west. You've come from the west; you've come from the east. Thank you so much for being here. We are very grateful you agreed to come.

We would like to start with Ms. Calhoun, for five to seven minutes maximum, please.

**Ms. Sue Calhoun (First Vice-President, Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs):** It's a great pleasure for me to be here today to speak on behalf of the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs. I'll do my best to keep it down, but I was told that I had 10 minutes, and I spent the day travelling to be here.

BPW Canada, as we call it, was founded in 1930, along with our International Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs. Our mission is to improve the economic, social, political, and employment conditions of women in the workforce. We have clubs in over 100 countries, including about 45 in Canada. We are a non-profit organization, funded strictly through membership. We do not receive government funding, and except for essential services such as bookkeeping, we are all volunteers.

We applaud the standing committee's initiative in undertaking these hearings on the economic security of senior women. Income disparity between senior women and men has been an issue of great concern to BPW Canada over the years.

You received a copy of the brief that we prepared last year. It's a position statement on incomes for senior women. Some of the statistics that I use today come from that brief; others come from a fact sheet produced by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, and I've brought enough copies for everyone.

We know that a couple of decades ago pension reform in Canada vastly improved the incomes of many senior citizens. But there is still a serious discrepancy between the incomes of women and men in their senior years. In 2003 the poverty rate for senior women in Canada was almost double that of men: 19% compared to 10%.

Over 40% of Canadian women over the age of 65 who are unattached, meaning living alone, live in poverty. That's a lot of women. Why is this the case? I'll give you some statistics, and these come from the flyer I handed out.

At every level of education, women in Canada earn less than men on average. For example, in 2003 women who were high school graduates earned 71% of what male high school graduates earned. Women with post-secondary degrees earned 68.9% of what their male counterparts with post-secondary degrees earned.

Even in female-dominated professions such as teaching and nursing, and in clerical work, men still earn more on average. In 2003 the average earnings for women who were full-time, full-year teachers were \$47,500; male teachers made an average of \$63,000.

In 2004, 70% of women with children under five years of age were in the workforce. That's up from 37% in 1976, yet women are still expected to be the primary caregivers. In 2004 women missed an average of 10 days of work due to these commitments. In a lot of jobs, when you miss work you don't get paid.

How many days did men miss for their family commitments? Does anybody have an idea? It was a day and a half—not much more than in the 1970s.

Canadian women are less likely to have employer-sponsored pension plans and less able to put money aside in private retirement savings plans.

So on average—and this is average, because we can all point to exceptions—women make less money than men throughout their working lives, so they have less money to live on when they retire. Women live longer than men, as all of us know, so women are more likely than men to be living alone at the end of their lives. Hence the high rates of poverty among women over 65 living alone.

So what are the solutions? In our brief we've listed a number of recommendations. I won't go into detail about them; I'll just list them, because I know time is short here today.

The first thing we suggested was an increase in the guaranteed income supplement. We suggested that the government needs to restructure the Canada Pension Plan, so that it replaces 50% of the income of low-income workers. Right now it's structured to replace 25%, which means that those who receive the least income while they're working also receive the least income when they're retired.

• (1535)

We also recommend that the government increase the contribution ceiling for CPP. Right now it's at \$40,500, and that's the maximum earnings on which CPP is calculated. We recommend that it be raised to \$60,000, which would mean that higher-income earners would contribute more to the fund. We recommend as well that the federal government develop a dropout provision in the CPP similar to what exists for women with young children, who are able to discount the first seven years of their child's life.

We think the government should eliminate taxes for all individuals in Canada with incomes below the poverty line. We also recommend that the government carry out a review and a revision of all legislation and regulations governing private pension plans to remove any provisions that impact negatively on senior women.

Some people say this situation belongs to the past, because women today when they finish school go right into the workforce. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Many factors continue to impact the wages and salaries of women in the workforce today.

I was glad to hear the committee is taking a holistic approach, because we're saying we need to resolve the problems of senior women living in poverty today. The problem will not be resolved unless you take a holistic approach and look at all the things that impact on what women in the workforce are able to make today. Some of the things are as follows: a lack of accessible, affordable, quality child care; women are still the primary caregivers, so they're working part-time, often in low-paid positions; women entrepreneurs can't have a baby and access EI maternity leave; and pay equity seems to largely be stalled in this country. The total of these factors means that the average woman continues to earn less money throughout her working life, so she will have less money to live on when she reaches those so-called golden years.

Old age will continue to be a time of insecurity and suffering for large numbers of senior women, especially those who are living alone without the key social reforms that promote and support the equality of working women. We realize that addressing economic security for senior women is a complex affair, with no quick or easy solution, but it must be done, and BPW Canada urges the federal government to act immediately on these very important issues.

I'm wrapping up, and before I close, I would like to take an opportunity to comment on the recent changes to the mandate and the budget of Status of Women Canada. We are aware that your standing committee has recommended that the government continue funding all activities of Status of Women at the 2005-06 level or higher, and that the government reinstate the previous mandate for another five years. We agree with your assessment, and this is a quote from your own report: "Whereas the draconian changes to the Terms and Conditions to the Women's Program under Status of Women undermines the very basis of our democracy—the ability to advocate on behalf of vulnerable groups..."

As a group that has advocated on behalf of working women in Canada for more than 75 years, we totally agree. Without the ability to speak out on behalf of those who can't, many advocacy groups and many vulnerable individuals will be effectively silenced. That is not the kind of society that we, BPW Canada, or you I'm sure, want to live in or want to pass on to your children and their children.

Again, we thank the standing committee for inviting us here. On behalf of our president, Fran Donaldson, and our national board of directors, I wish you well in your deliberations.

• (1540)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I hate to cut you off, but I really have to insist that you speak for five to seven minutes, so try to maintain that because we have a lot of questions that have to come through.

Ms. West, you're next. Are you going to be splitting time with Ms. Blake?

**Ms. Alice West (Chair, Women Elders in Action):** I'll try to make it as brief as possible, I'll do my very best.

**The Chair:** We will try to be a little flexible as well.

**Ms. Alice West:** But there's so much to tell you to make you aware of what the real situation is.

Again, I would like to thank you for inviting us, because it's an extremely important thing to be doing, looking at what senior women are facing these days.

I couldn't agree more with my colleague Sue Calhoun. The things she talked about are the things that we are also very concerned with.

Our committee started in early 2000, when we realized that poverty was a great issue. When we looked at housing, transportation, and all the various issues that affected senior women, we realized that poverty was at the base of it all and that we had to do something about it.

We were able, through the Status of Women, which gave us some funding, to do a good deal of research, and we produced several papers on what is happening to senior women. We've been engaged in similar work with the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University, which offered us an hour's program once a month where we talk about the issues that confront women. So we are making a dent in the knowledge factor around the Lower Mainland in particular.

We have a number of myths that face women and pensions. We have a paper on it, and I'm going to skip over it because I believe it will be distributed.

For me, on a personal note, I'd like to tell you that this is my third time around on what's happening to the status of women. In the sixties I was involved in the fight for women's equality, period—women's equality in the workplace, and the recognition of women, what they have actually accomplished, and what their role in society is.

In the eighties we had a long fight over the pay equity question. Pay equity is not universal. It is simply not universal. It's a great myth in this country that women have it good—they don't, not necessarily at all. The income gap, which is taken up by caregiving and taken up by child rearing and the rest of it, is a gap in the workplace. That translates into a gap in retirement. And it affects women mostly, because women outlive men.

Women Elders in Action doesn't share the belief that income security for senior women is no longer a concern. We believe that while inroads have been made, the situation for unattached senior women continues to need improvement. More importantly, current trends are destabilizing the promise of secure futures for today's waged women.

We have registered retirement savings plans. Particularly at this time of the year, everybody's talking about them. And they're not going to save the day for most Canadians. RRSPs, which seem to be society's preferred tools, are actually out of the reach of many citizens. They will not be the panacea for retirement income shortfalls for low-income individuals, who struggle to make contributions, if at all.

According to research done for the National Advisory Council on Aging, people with low incomes actually derive no advantage from investing in RRSPs. People with low incomes pay little or no income taxes during their working lives, so their tax breaks are minimal. If they are entitled to the GIS upon retirement, they will actually be penalized when they cash in their RRSPs, as these amounts will inevitably lead to a reduction in the GIS benefits. As well, other provincial and territorial income supplements of subsidized housing may also be diminished, which is a factor that we have to look at.

And there are several other complications on the horizon. We've observed that the U.S. and the U.K., as well as several European countries, have moved to raise the pension age to 67 or 68. Women 55 years and older are often at a very great disadvantage because if they lose their jobs at that particular point in time, they have a very hard time finding other jobs. And they often have to resort to very low-income, part-time, very precarious work.

● (1545)

We think that the Status of Women should be concerned about the number of single mothers and other unattached women who are living in poverty. Obviously these women, who have trouble making ends meet today, will not have the money to put into private pension plans for their future or have working incomes large enough to afford more than the minimal amount of Canada Pension Plan tomorrow.

WE\*ACT confirms the points made by the National Advisory Council on Aging that to protect the financial security of women, we need—these are just some of the ideas—a substantial GIS increase, a substantial increase in low-cost housing, and mandatory pension splitting upon divorce to help improve conditions for senior women today and those facing retirement in the future.

We have a larger number of points to make, and we'd be very happy to share them with all of you. It's just unfortunate that my colleague Joanne Blake can't have the time she needs for her presentation.

**The Chair:** I have a couple of minutes I can give you. Would you be able to do it in two minutes?

**Ms. Joanne Blake (Member, Women Elders in Action):** Sure, I can cut it down a wee bit.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Ms. Joanne Blake:** Our major policy recommendations came out in this document, and it's called *Pensions in Canada: Policy Reform Because Women Matter*. I think the previous two speakers have given a good picture of why women matter.

The majority of retirees are women, partly because of differences in life expectancy between men and women. As men and women age, the proportion of men and women seniors decreases in that there are fewer men.

Currently, almost 50% of unattached women over 65 have incomes below the poverty line. The future for a large number of elder women today seems bleak. For example—and something that Alice and I decided when we were planning this was to give you sort of a personal idea of our experience with pensions and retirement—I just turned 65, and my first pension cheque will arrive at the end of this month. This pension cheque will be \$812 for the old age pension and the GIS combined. And what little CPP I managed to gather through my working career is \$290. You add those two amounts and it's \$1,103, which is \$13,236 a year, and I have two degrees. But I raised two children, and I stayed home to raise those two children, and in my fifties I had an illness that took me out of the labour market.

This is just to give you a real-life picture of how even an educated, experienced worker can end up with a very low retirement pension.

I guess that is my time.

**The Chair:** Well, one thing we can do is do it in the Q and A, and perhaps you can elaborate on that.

For those members who are a little late, we are closing the meeting at 4:30, because some of the people have to go, and I didn't want the committee to disappear.

We will start off with the first round, and Ms. Beaumier, for five minutes.

**Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West, Lib.):** Thank you.

I'd like to congratulate all three of you on the work you're doing. I think many of us in our society tend to forget some of these issues until we're confronted with them.

My focus has been on immigrants, and not just on immigrants but on seniors who are brought to this country. Many of them are being brought here as part of family reunification, and as you know, income requirements aren't all that high in order to bring your parents over. We now have a two-tier system in this country, meaning that if you come from a European country with which we have signed pension agreements, then you get your pension—actually a quarter of the pension, the old age security. We have a lot of immigrants coming here from third world countries. Their families are struggling, and the government—not just this current one, but governments in the past—has decided that these people are not eligible for pensions, and that they have to be here for 10 years.

So that's one of my pushes right now. I don't know if it's going to get royal acceptance or not, but it's a very serious issue.

The other very serious issue we have is with immigrant women who have come here primarily as domestics. We know that once they're no longer needed to take care of children in these homes, they go out into the workforce, and they generally have to take low-paying jobs, with no union protection and no labour protection, in the service industry. It's hard, heavy work, and as you get into your fifties you begin to get a little bit arthritic, and you're not quite as strong as you were to be able to care for others. You have \$1,103 to live on, and there are many women living in these circumstances.

What I'm concerned about is the lack of affordable housing. I want you to address that issue. Maybe you have some numbers on the number of women—I don't know where they live—who are maybe tossed from one family to the next.

The other issue is income splitting. It may help lower-income families in which there are two people, but how can we come up with a solution to take women who have no income to split and make it more equitable for them?

• (1550)

**The Chair:** You've left only two minutes to answer now. Go ahead.

**Ms. Alice West:** The problem of immigrant women is one that we have encountered, and we've been trying to figure out just what we can do with it. It's very unfortunate that even if you're a Canadian citizen, but you're an immigrant late in life, you get only one-quarter of the old age pension for each year that you've lived in Canada between the ages of 18 and 65. We have some of the same problems with aboriginal women, and we're having a rather difficult time getting in contact with some of these women who are leading very poor lives.

Income splitting is something that really has to be looked at in total, and the regulations that govern pensions in Canada have to be looked at and have to be far more equitable again—and each clause taken word for word almost. The same goes for CPP. CPP is not very equitable even when it comes to survivor benefits. It's extremely poor, and there has to be something done.

Perhaps my colleagues here would like to add to that.

**Ms. Sue Calhoun:** I would just say that when BPW Canada prepared our brief last year, we realized that what we came up with was really only the tip of the iceberg. It is a very complex issue. We are all volunteers in our organization, and we do our best, but most of us are still trying to make a living as well. The whole question of the treatment of immigrant women in terms of pensions was one that we did discuss. We did not come up with solutions just because we didn't have time to pursue that, but we do see our brief as really the start of something, and we still have a task force within the organization to pursue some of the issues.

I think you make a very good point about affordable housing, because that's obviously part of the big picture. What we're dealing with is a very complex issue that touches a lot of different sectors, and housing obviously is one of them.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now go to Ms. Demers.

[*Translation*]

You have five minutes.

• (1555)

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

Good afternoon, mesdames. Thank you for telling us about your experiences. It's very enriching for us to know what is actually going on in the field.

Ms. West, you told us about a few issues concerning 55-year-old women who lose their jobs. Previously, there was the Program for Older Worker Adjustment, POWA, which enabled older workers who lost their jobs to make it to retirement with a decent income. That program no longer exists. It's been transformed.

Do you believe that kind of program could help women who lose their jobs after the age of 55? It's harder for them to find another job than men.

Ms. Calhoun, Bill C-36 is currently being considered by the Human Resources Committee. It's a very interesting bill: people will only have to apply for the Guaranteed Income Supplement once in order to automatically receive it thereafter. I must admit that the government has introduced a very promising bill. However, we're not talking about raising the Guaranteed Income Supplement to the poverty line. The poverty line in Canada is approximately \$14,000, which is very low. In Quebec, it's \$17,000 for a single person. So the poverty line is much higher in the provinces.

Should we establish a poverty line that takes the needs of older persons more into account? Needs increase as we age: drugs, housing, food, taxis and so on. Could we increase people's incomes?

**Ms. Sue Calhoun:** I know the program you referred to, POWA. That program was very beneficial, but it wasn't accessible in all provinces. In New Brunswick, for example, very few people had access to it, even though it was a federal program.

My company conducted a study on that program. It was a good idea because a number of people in the Atlantic region worked in the fisheries. Not only men and fishermen, but also women who worked in plants lost their jobs because of the cod moratorium.

It was a good program, but it should have been accessible in all provinces, not just in a few.

[English]

**The Chair:** Would you like to add anything more, Ms. West or Ms. Blake?

**Ms. Alice West:** You'll have to pardon my lack of French. If you heard me, you'd laugh. I'll try to do this in English.

Yes, we think this program is very important. People over age 55 have the most difficulty finding any job. As a matter of fact—and I have to admit I did work for the federal government at one time—we found that even people over the age of 40 had greater difficulty finding work.

It's extremely important that we have a bridge somewhere between involuntary layoff.... People don't close down the fish plants or the logging industry or whatever it might be; the corporations do it for their financial benefit. But it leaves the working person alone. They may qualify for EI for a very limited period of time, so they need that bridging. It has to be a decent bridging; it cannot be a minimal amount, which barely keeps body and soul together.

So yes, we're very much in favour of that, and we would certainly support things like that.

Unfortunately, I don't know what Bill C-36 says, so I can't comment on it.

• (1600)

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Demers.

[English]

We will now go to Ms. Smith for five minutes.

**Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** I want to thank you so much for coming today.

As a status of women committee, we wanted to do research especially on economic concerns that senior women have.

I was interested in something you said, Ms. Calhoun. I was a teacher for 22 years. You were saying that women who are in the teaching profession often aren't paid the same as men. Both my husband and I taught, and I actually earned more than he did because I was better educated. He's well educated as well, but in most school divisions they pay according to your education, not according to

your gender. I was also on the teachers' union, negotiating for wages and things like that. So on what basis would you say that?

When you look at senior women, there are a lot of women who went into the teaching profession, and likewise, into the nursing profession. My sister, a nurse, was paid exactly the same, according to her education.

Can you tell me what you base that on? What we are missing here? How did you get your data?

**Ms. Sue Calhoun:** Those figures come from the fact sheet that was handed out to people today. It was produced by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. If you look at that—

**Mrs. Joy Smith:** I have that, but my question is not that. Thank you. My question is, where did their data come from? How did they get their data, and what was their sampling?

Being in the teaching profession for so many years, I just know that this is not the case. I negotiated, and we went across province, all across Canada. I can say that to my knowledge, after 22 years of being in the teaching profession, both women and men are paid according to their education, not according to their gender.

**Ms. Sue Calhoun:** That information comes from Statistics Canada, a document called *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*, fifth edition, produced in 2006 by Industry Canada.

**Mrs. Joy Smith:** I was very interested in that. With the experience I've had and what I know about it, I just wondered how they gathered their data, because coming to something like this, we need to be very aware.

**Ms. Sue Calhoun:** May I just—

**Mrs. Joy Smith:** I just have a few minutes, so I need to go on to Ms. Blake. Thank you for answering that question. I appreciate it.

Ms. Blake, I was very moved by your compelling assessment of a woman who, as you say, has two degrees and who elected to stay home with her children, and then unfortunately had a medical situation. Could you please give this committee some advice as to what you think would be really helpful for women in a position like that? Life happens, and you don't have control over that. So could you give us some more advice? I was very moved by what you said.

**Ms. Joanne Blake:** I think what it takes is, for instance, the issue of affordability of housing. If I could find affordable, decent housing, that would go a long way to helping me.

Also there is the provision of all the benefits of health care without the costs, and not this whittled-down health care that exists now, at least in our province, where seniors are not able to have access to podiatry, have access to very little massage, very little physiotherapy, all the kinds of treatments that give you a comfortable old age and are preventative.

The other thing is pharmacare, a national pharmacare program, at least for people over 65 but preferably for the 55 to 65 age group as well, maybe with some qualifications.

• (1605)

**Mrs. Joy Smith:** Do I have more time?

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds.

**Mrs. Joy Smith:** I'm trying to go really quickly. I'm not being rude; I'm just trying to keep within my timeframe. I have those constraints too.

I find the kinds of things you're saying extremely useful to us here in the committee. What are the social supports that you think are so necessary to put in as well?

**Ms. Joanne Blake:** I would think that housing issues could encompass some sort of collective or cooperative—people involved in creating collective or cooperative housing for seniors—and possibly a mix between that and various creative ways of providing housing, where people have a say in what kind of housing, and where and with whom they live, and so on.

**The Chair:** We are now going to Ms. Mathysen for five minutes.

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

I was a teacher in Ontario for 25 years and I think I could answer that question about why men make more. If you look at the promotion of teachers to department heads, to vice-principals, to principals, to superintendents, to directors of education, I would venture to guess that there are very few female directors of education in this country, and they would certainly make three to four times what a classroom teacher would make. In 1985 I was a secondary teacher and a female vice-principal was an anomaly, a rarity. People actually went into her office to look at this incredible and strange aberration.

So perhaps that helps.

I have a couple of questions, and I want to begin with something that's become of real concern to me. In my constituency, single moms are in difficulty with Canada Revenue Agency because they have to prove that they are single, that they aren't cohabiting, and their child tax credit is at risk. It's clawed back. They're threatened with having it clawed back. Senior women are experiencing difficulty in terms of dealing with various agencies.

Would it make a difference if certain government departments, like HRSDC and CRA, had an advocate right in the ministry, right within the institution, for vulnerable people? Is that something that makes sense?

**Ms. Alice West:** Yes, definitely.

**Mrs. Irene Mathysen:** I will then keep pursuing that.

It was quite interesting, Ms. Calhoun. You talked about the fact that the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs is self-funded. You receive no funding from Status of Women Canada, no support at all. Yet you were very supportive of the research advocacy role of women's organizations and the importance of maintaining that.

I wonder if all of our visitors could comment on why that's so important.

**Ms. Sue Calhoun:** I would say that for BPW Canada, the only money we get comes from our members. We have always seen a very important role for Status of Women Canada. For example, we access that research in preparing briefs like this. We depend on that research a lot. That was done by Status of Women Canada. We also work with groups across the country, and I'll give you a couple of examples of the impact of the change in the mandate to the Status of Women in New Brunswick.

We have a pay equity coalition that's been going on for a few years. We have an urban support core group that has worked with poor people in Saint John. We have a child care advocacy group that has been working towards getting quality, affordable, accessible child care in this country, which does not exist. And all of those groups are finished. They're ended. Yes, they're all finished. The funding for the pay equity coalition will continue, they've been told, until September 2008. The child care coalition finishes in June. As for the urban core support group, which has done amazing work with poor people in Saint John, they're not sure, but it pretty well looks as though they're finished because Status of Women does not fund advocacy anymore.

The position that we as an organization take is that direct services are very important, obviously—food banks and all those kinds of direct services, educational programs. There are a lot of problems, and I'll use the food bank as an example. You can feed people from now until eternity, and you'll still be feeding them unless you do something that deals with why people need food banks in the first place, with why people are poor. When we talk about that, we're talking about systemic changes to the society we live in. There are no easy solutions, but there need to be those kinds of changes.

BPW Canada has always been an advocacy group. That's what we do. We are an advocacy group. Unless those groups have a voice... and a lot of them were supported by the Status of Women. They will no longer have a voice; those groups are all finished.

So now we go back to food banks and we keep feeding people for another 100 years.

• (1610)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Would you like to comment? You have 20 seconds.

**Ms. Alice West:** I'd like to comment on that.



Our organization has been sponsored by the Status of Women, and we're very grateful for all the help that we've received. Because of that, we were able to hire a part-time...and this, again, is a woman in later life who is working part-time, but she's doing quite a bit of the research for us, because some of us, particularly in my age group, are not really very computer literate. I have a difficult time, so I recognize that and I appreciate the help that our part-time worker gives us.

But we would not be able to do any of this. We would not have been able to find out just exactly what is happening. And we toured the province; we went all across our province of British Columbia. We talked to women in the small communities and the little villages as well as the big cities, and we found that there were so many differences that took place. And women themselves knew there should be some change, there should be something better, but they didn't know how to go about it.

And we're hopeful. We're maintaining that contact with women so they know how to speak up for themselves, so they know how they can better their lives. And they want better lives for their children. This is what we should be thinking of—the future.

If the Status of Women cuts off all funding to groups like ours—and we're not the only group—this type of funding, so we can do this, so we can advocate on behalf of the people who are less fortunate, then I'm afraid we'll be backsliding, and about 20 years from now I'll come in with my cane and I'll be telling you that you've failed miserably.

**The Chair:** I will give you a closing remark to make. So make a note of it, and you can do that in your closing remark.

Ms. Minna, for five minutes, please.

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to share a bit of time with Ms. Neville, since we are closing early today. I want to ask a couple of very quick questions.

Ms. Calhoun, you mentioned something about cutting taxes, although I missed the end of what you said, and I wasn't quite sure what you meant by that. Maybe you could expand on that in a minute. I just want to ask two questions, and then Ms. Neville will ask one, and maybe you can group them, if that's okay with you.

Some of you mentioned splitting the RRSP at the time of a divorce. The government has done what's called income splitting, but that helps only couples who are married. It does not help the woman, because it's not splitting pensions, where the women get a portion of the pension in their hand that they can call their own. The family gets a tax break, but it doesn't really help the woman.

So my question is whether you would support pension splitting, and that is for all pensions subsidized by the government—Canada Pension Plan, RRSPs, OAS—whatever it is, you split it between the couple. And of course, increase the GIS, I agree with you. Also, it's true we need to look at the poorness of the RRSPs, that they really don't help most Canadians.

But I just wonder if you could give me an answer to the issue of pension splitting as at least one vehicle for the current seniors.

•(1615)

**Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** That was actually my question. I'm assuming that when you're talking about pension splitting on marriage breakup, you're talking about more than the CPP; you're talking about any pension that has government support?

Okay, that's fine.

**Hon. Maria Minna:** To finish, my question is not about divorce, but about pension splitting across the board, regardless of divorce or not. Women get 50% and men get 50% of what they've accumulated during their lifetime.

Do you have any comment?

**Ms. Sue Calhoun:** Well, I have to tell you that BPW Canada hasn't really studied this issue enough for me to be able to tell you what we think, and normally we try to avoid talking off the top of our head if it's not a policy of the organization. So I really can't answer that question.

**The Chair:** I think Ms. Minna asked you about eliminating taxes—for whom?

**Ms. Sue Calhoun:** Was that the question? I didn't hear the question, but I think—

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Yes, earlier you mentioned eliminating taxes for...

**Ms. Sue Calhoun:** Taxes for all individuals in Canada with incomes below the poverty line.

**Ms. Alice West:** That is something we would support. As a matter of fact, we have in our paper that anybody who lives below the so-called low-income cut-off would not pay any taxes at all. Unfortunately, that's not the case today.

As far as income splitting is concerned, the 50-50, it is a fraught with a few dangers. We talk about Canada Pension Plan survivor benefits right now, and it's 60% for the survivor, and it's usually the woman who is the survivor. This is the majority rule again. Even if a husband and wife both have a Canada Pension, the survivor is supposed to get 60%, but they don't get 60%, they get 40% of the 60%. That's one of the things that happen in CPP.

Also, if you talk about splitting 50-50, it sounds very nice; it's very equitable, it's very democratic, and we love it. But what happens if one of the persons dies? Are you left with that 50%, whereas you might have gotten 60% as a survivor?

**Hon. Maria Minna:** No, you still get the survivor benefits, in my view. All I'm saying is that while the couple is alive and living together, generally the wives, because of time spent raising family and what have you, have lower pensions and therefore less money in their hands. They should get 50% of the household income of those pensions that are subsidized by government. Of course, when one or the other spouse dies, then the inheritance portion would apply automatically as well. That wouldn't be lost, in my view.

**Ms. Alice West:** That was just a little concern of mine. The devil is in the details.

**Hon. Maria Minna:** I understand your concern, yes.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now go to Mr. Stanton, for five minutes.

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

My thanks to our panel. I'm sorry we are unable to give the fullest of time here for your presentations this afternoon, but I appreciate your being here.

I'm going to present two ideas, and then I'll ask you both to respond. I'll put both ideas in play, and then I'll ask you both to talk. We'll use up our five minutes that way.

At our last meeting of this committee when we were discussing this topic, we were presented with some information that suggested that on issues like educational attainment, on the earnings rate—this isn't the total earnings, which we see at 70%—we heard from departments that the gap in the rate of earnings, the rate per day, the rate per hour, women versus men, is in fact closing. It's sitting at about 86% right now. There has been some movement there, and workforce participation of women is growing steadily.

In total—and I'll just go back to that educational attainment issue, for example—women are seeing, more and more, an increasing representation in post-secondary education. That, for example, is growing. It's higher, and it's getting close to 60% now in terms of women with degrees, post-graduate degrees, and those sorts of things. Those are some very positive trends. I would ask for your comments on that, given that some of those trends, some of the circumstances that you outlined today, are in fact improving.

The second point is that you both talked about expanding GIS and expanding social benefits. How would you like to see the government raise money to pay for those extra social benefits: with higher taxes or by cutting expenses?

I'll let you go ahead.

• (1620)

**Ms. Joanne Blake:** I'd like to take the part about highly educated women and that they're being educated more and more. What we're looking at in the year 2031 is the retirement of the final group of the baby boomers. These are people who are already in the job market, and some of them are already exiting and becoming retirees. In the long term, you're going to have a great big block of retirees whom we call the baby boomers in 2031. That will consist of 25% of the Canadian population.

Even if women become more successful in the workforce in the next ten or fifteen years, as a government you're still going to have to deal with this great big block of baby boomers, who are beginning to retire right now and will finish their retirement in 2031. They will not be part of that group of women who—

**Mr. Bruce Stanton:** How do we pay for the social benefits?

**Ms. Joanne Blake:** How do we pay for social benefits?

**Mr. Bruce Stanton:** Yes, for increased GIS, more benefits—

**Ms. Joanne Blake:** Ms. Calhoun has mentioned some of them, such as raising the level of contribution to the CPP up to \$60,000 and some, as opposed to \$40,000.

**Mr. Bruce Stanton:** That was an interesting idea.

With CPP, you basically draw out what you contributed.

**Ms. Sue Calhoun:** That's right.

**Mr. Bruce Stanton:** So even if you raise the total amount, it will raise more money for that individual, but it wouldn't necessarily contribute to higher benefits for other individuals, because in CPP you only draw out what you contribute.

**Ms. Sue Calhoun:** What I said earlier was that raising it to \$60,000 would mean that higher-income earners contribute more to the fund. Right now, CPP is structured to replace 25% of your income, and we're recommending that it be increased to 50% for low-income workers.

**Mr. Bruce Stanton:** So that would require a higher contribution rate, higher payroll taxes, on the front end that people would contribute.

**Ms. Joanne Blake:** It's not a payroll tax.

**Mr. Bruce Stanton:** Yes, it is.

**Ms. Joanne Blake:** No, it's not. It's an insurance that's paid by the employee and the employer.

**Mr. Bruce Stanton:** Correct. That's what makes it a payroll tax.

**Ms. Sue Calhoun:** It's not really a payroll tax.

We're not economists. We're not here to tell you to cut this budget and move it over there—that kind of thing.

One example, and one thing that I think the committee should think of, is that there is a lot of research on the connection between poverty and health. Senior women living alone in poverty use the health care system, which is already overburdened, much more than people who are not poor.

I'm not making that up. There is information and research, and if you want me to send you some, I will.

If we raise the GIS, because we want to give those people—and it's not just women, but the bulk are—living only on OAS and GIS more money to improve their health, to make them less poor, hopefully they will be less dependent on the health care system. That's one approach to take.

**The Chair:** Do that as a closing remark.

Ms. Deschamps.

[*Translation*]

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

First, I'd like to welcome you. It's a great pleasure for me to hear your evidence. Ms. West and Ms. Blake, I consider you pioneers. You have experience, you've fought and argued, and you've been committed to the cause of women. Part of me would like to thank you for everything you've done for the cause of women, and you, Ms. Calhoun.

However, I'm very disappointed to hear that the poverty rate among older women in Canada is nearly twice that of men, and that the vast majority of people living in poverty are women. It can even be said that poverty is specific to women.

The road to poverty is also a major stressor for women who have to make life choices. Even if they want a place in the labour market, at some point, they have to make a family choice that may perhaps unconsciously lead them to a state of poverty.

Ms. Calhoun, is it possible to develop a strategy that would help the women of today and tomorrow have an occupational and personal life that suits them, a strategy that could ultimately remove them from this economic insecurity?

• (1625)

**Ms. Sue Calhoun:** Do you mean for all women, or just older women?

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps:** Statistics and studies show that older women are currently the poorest. Based on that observation, what can we do for today's women and those of tomorrow?

**Ms. Sue Calhoun:** We can do a number of things, but I don't know whether we have enough time to discuss them today. Earlier I said that 40 percent of women over the age of 65 who lived alone were living in poverty. The only group representing a larger percentage is that of mothers who are the heads of single-parent families, more than half of whom live in poverty with their children.

I like the idea that you address the issue of women's insecurity in a comprehensive manner. We have to talk about the status of older women living in poverty today, but we also have to address that of women who live in poverty with their children and that of women who are in the labour market. I mentioned, among other things, the lack of child care services, which at times forces a woman to work part time or to accept a low-paying job because she's responsible for the custody of the children. The same is true of women entrepreneurs who don't have access to those services and who have to stay at home when they have a baby.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you so much. I know there's so much to ask.

Ms. Mathysen.

**Mrs. Irene Mathysen:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

There was a discussion about the connection between poverty and the impact on the health care system. I wanted to explore another piece of that.

I have a 28-year-old constituent who is a single mother, and she's just discovered that she has cervical cancer. She works in a job where there are no benefits and there's no access to a drug plan. She's actually resisting, holding back on her care, because she doesn't know what will happen to her child if she goes for the surgery or how she'll be able to afford the drugs once she comes out of the hospital.

I'm wondering if you've had experience with that same situation, and could you comment on that?

**Ms. Alice West:** Well, personally I've been a caregiver—my mother, my brother, and my husband. I've also had to receive care

when I was ill. It's a very stressful situation, extremely stressful. It also aggravates some of the illness problems. It's not good for your mental health as well.

Unfortunately, in this country we seem to take caregiving as something somebody will do—it doesn't matter who; they're off in the east or somewhere, but they'll come and look after it. And it's usually the women who leave their jobs to look after somebody, to look after their aging parents or their children who are ill, and there is no compensation for that. They have to leave their job and get no pay, which immediately cuts down on the family income, which immediately cuts down on the medication they can afford, and whether they can even live in the same place where they have been.

So the volunteer caregiving in this country, the whole country alone—it's a very rich country—saves the health care system \$5 billion every year. We have to have some recompense for these people who are doing these things. I think we could save an awful lot of money, not just the \$5 billion, by paying some of these people or giving them the care, setting up some method of making sure this woman in your constituency has the proper child care, that she has the proper care when she is recuperating so that she can go back to work as an able-bodied person and look after her own affairs.

Something that seems to be ignored is the actual cause. If we get at the causes, we can eliminate a lot of the problems. We won't eliminate them all, but we can do it.

We have such a wealth of talent in this country that I'm just surprised that people seem to balk at doing something about caring for their neighbour. You know, at one time this country was full of that. I grew up on the Prairies, and that was an automatic thing that you did. If your neighbour was in trouble, then by golly, you were down there, helping in whatever way you could, whether it was a casserole or looking after the kids. Well, that should be expanded to make sure nobody in this country has a need like that.

I don't know. I just bang my head against the wall every time. I'm sorry about that.

• (1630)

**The Chair:** You still have half a minute, if you want to add something.

**Mrs. Irene Mathysen:** It leaves me breathless too.

Ms. Calhoun, I wanted to come back to you. You were describing the impact of the loss of services in the Atlantic community, and you seemed to be getting a head of steam going. I wonder if you could even begin to describe what that will mean for all those people in the community.

**Ms. Sue Calhoun:** Are you talking about changes to Status of Women?

**Mrs. Irene Mathysen:** Yes.

**Ms. Sue Calhoun:** What I wanted to add to that—and actually I put it on the list of things for my closing remarks, but I'll say it right now—is this. For people who live in Ontario, the provincial government may or may not fund advocacy—I'm not sure if it does—but I want to assure you that provincial governments in the east do not fund advocacy. The Government of New Brunswick has never funded advocacy. So basically what that means is that those groups that have been advocating, trying to change a system to address some of the things we've been talking about today, are no longer there. They're gone.

**The Chair:** Committee members, since you agreed that you wanted to stop at 4.30 p.m., what I will now do is give each of the panellists, one from the east and one from the west, a minute to wrap up. And thank you profusely for taking the time to come. Sometimes we get into time crunches, and we apologize for that, but you've really filled our minds with certain ideas. You've given a lot of food for thought, and we will continue our study on that, and we'll have witnesses coming as well.

Ms. Blake, would you like to make the first closing remarks, for a minute?

**Ms. Joanne Blake:** I would like to reiterate a few of the recommendations we've made that should be acted upon in the short and medium term because of this bulk of retirees who are coming by 2031. Of course there's affordable, accessible housing and a variety, a creative variety, of housing that people can become involved in, possibly by putting in a small amount of their own money, and not necessarily the old model. There is pay equity for women, compensation for unpaid work as caregivers to children and elders, and accessibility to post-secondary education for those who can't afford it so that there aren't these huge and growing gaps in the distribution of wealth.

I think the economics that our governments have been practising for the last ten to fifteen years has been creating a huge gap between the wealthy and the poor. And that is not a situation that any society can bear if it wants a peaceful society.

•(1635)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll go to Ms. West.

**Ms. Alice West:** Yes, thank you.

I'd like to thank the committee for this opportunity to tell you about the experiences we've had, and what has happened in British Columbia particularly, where we're from.

One of things that haven't been mentioned here is child poverty. It's appalling that this country even discusses the words “child poverty”. Parliament promised a long time ago to eradicate child poverty. I was so hopeful, as were a good many of the people I knew, that if we eradicated child poverty, that meant there wouldn't be poor families, that they would be able to do the things we expect Canadians to be able to do. That is something I think the committee should take a really good look at.

The education part is extremely important. The better education we have, the better we can cope with the problems that are there. But it can't be that you relegate people with high education to...well, McDonald's jobs. Unfortunately, I know a couple of people who

have degrees who are working in McDonald's at the age of 64. Do we want that? Is that the society we want? I believe Parliament has to take a look at it, that this committee has to advise Parliament about what kind of society we want.

Everybody who comes to a committee like this shows you the problem. We have indicated some of the problems we've encountered. We need to do better on education, as I've said, and we need better housing. And it's not just social housing, putting up a block and sticking those people in there. As Joanne mentioned, there are so many creative ways, through co-op housing, through various ways. Experiment a little. Try to figure out what will work or won't work.

We have to do something now about senior women who cannot afford to buy their medication. One of the members we had coming to our committee used to say, “I have to decide whether I can take my pills every day and not buy my groceries, or buy groceries and take my pills every second or third day.” That's not a situation we want to continue.

I would also ask that this committee continue to fund people like my group and other groups who are advocating for women. They're telling you what is a reality in this country. Please listen to them.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. West.

Ms. Calhoun.

**Ms. Sue Calhoun:** We've touched on a lot of issues today. I know people realize that the economic security for senior women that we talk about touches a lot of areas and impacts a lot of things, starting from when women first get into the workforce. If they don't have decent child care, they may be forced out for a few years, or they may work part-time.

I always find it amazing that we're so into attracting immigrants into the country these days. I think if we made this country a little more child friendly and family friendly, that if we had a family strategy, a family policy, women would have more babies. But that's not happening, and lot of women are ending up not having babies because it's just too hard; it's impossible.

We've touched on a lot of thing. I know it's complex. I really hope the committee doesn't get bogged down and think, oh, this is just too hard; how do we deal with it? There are things we've talked about that need to be addressed right now, in terms of the large group of senior women who are living in poverty. There are some things that need to change right now. But there are other things that impact every area and every period of a woman's life.

I want to respond to what Mr. Stanton said about education improving and the wages improving. I agree, we've seen a lot of positive things for women in the last 20 years; there's no question about that. Where it breaks down is on the whole issue of caregiving, because women are still taking 10 days off a year for their family commitments, and men are still taking a day and a half. Until we can change that scenario, we're going to end up in situations where women are working part-time because they're looking after their elderly mother and their children at the same time—that kind of thing.

Again, I thank the committee.

Do I get to ask a question now?

• (1640)

**The Chair:** You can. Don't forget to give us your brief. We'll have it translated and distributed to the members.

Ms. Calhoun, you had a question.

**Ms. Sue Calhoun:** Yes. I wonder what happens now. What do you do? Do you make a report? Are you coming up with recommendations that will be a report to Parliament?

**The Chair:** We are continuing the study. We have a program as to how we are going to address it. We had native women last time, and we have the professional and senior women. We will be meeting to discuss the final outcome of all our witnesses' input.

Generally the process is that the witnesses are given a parameter and they produce it. Then the analysts prepare a briefing, and we decide how the report is to be written.

Thank you, once again

And thank you to the committee.

Yes, Ms. Neville.

**Hon. Anita Neville:** I don't know whether this is a point of order or a procedural issue. I was late because I was held up in the House. I apologize for that.

Many of us make our travel plans based on a 3:30 to 5:30 commitment. If there is an intention to have meetings end early, could you give us advance notice? I made my plans to be here until 5:30 p.m.

**The Chair:** Ms. Neville—

**Hon. Anita Neville:** I understand a vote was taken.

**The Chair:** —some committee members had a commitment and they had to leave. I didn't want the witnesses to see empty chairs. That is why I asked committee members if it was all right. They said it was. You know, when an urgency occurs.... Some people have government responsibilities and they need to go. I wanted to give them the courtesy of that.

Yes, Ms. Smith.

**Mrs. Joy Smith:** It was not us, actually. If we are here on time, we can then all be a part of that decision. And I know sometimes things happen when some of us can't be here on time.

But I thank you on behalf of whoever it was who couldn't be here. I know I'm about to give a speech in the House of Commons. I thank you for your consideration. I'm sure that if you can, in the future you'll try to give us some advance notice.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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