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Chair

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Members of the committee, we have with us witnesses from the University of Montreal and the Federal Superannuates National Association. From the University of Montreal we have Madame Ruth Rose, researcher, and from the Federal Superannuates National Association we have Monsieur Bernard Dussault, senior research and communications officer.

We're trying to locate the third witness, but since these witnesses are already here, we would like to start off with Madame Rose. Could give us your presentation in ten minutes?

[Translation]

Do you speak French or English?

Ms. Ruth Rose (Adjunct Professor of Economics, Université du Québec à Montréal): I will be making my presentation in French, but I will be happy to answer questions in English.

The Chair: Thank you. You have 10 minutes.

Ms. Ruth Rose: I would first like to point out that I am not from the University of Montreal, but from l'Université du Québec à Montréal.

[English]

The Chair: Pardon, my fault.

[Translation]

Ms. Ruth Rose: Please forgive me; I have been away and travelling for the last three weeks. I did not have as much time as I would have liked to prepare this presentation. You have the document in both languages. I will begin my presentation by making a few observations.

First, we can see that over the years, the gap between men and women has been shrinking, as it relates both to their participation in the workforce as well as their income. However, they are far from being equal. Women continue to assume most of the domestic chores, and more particularly, the care of others, whether it is their children or older people who can no longer take care of themselves. Therefore, they are still lagging behind when it comes to their participation in the labour force. They are the ones who are most likely to interrupt their career and most of them work part-time. That is one of the reasons why they earn less than their male counterparts, although wage discrimination does continue to exist.

They are more likely to be poorer while they are working, which means that they will be poorer in retirement as well. That is why the government, through social services and government transfers, is so important to their financial security. After young people, women are the ones who most benefit from social assistance. They are responsible for the care of their children. Therefore, child benefits are more important for them. Because their families are often poorer, they rely on these benefits to top up their income. Of course, they are the ones who are entitled to maternity leave because women are biologically different from men: they are the ones who carry the infants, who bear them and then who nurse them. As to parental benefits, men are encouraged to assume their share of parental responsibilities, but the women are in greater need of the benefits and the leave.

When it comes to retirement and public programs, Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement are universal programs intended to help low wage earners. Women receive less from these programs than do men, because they have lower salaries. Finally, services provided to the public, including health, education and child care services, are more important to women because they are less likely to have access to private plans.

I have a few graphs to support my arguments. I have chosen them because they were available but also because they illustrate the delayed entry of women into the labour market and their income level, and how this affects their retirement. I believe that you have a special interest in women's financial security at retirement, in other words, women who are seniors.

The first graph gives you the percentage of retirees who receive a pension, according to gender. The top line, the one that is closest to 100%, or 95%, represents men. The trend has been relatively stable for the past 10 years. The line along the bottom, with the small dots, begins at 19% in 1980 and approaches 67% in 2005. So the gap has been shrinking, but it has not yet disappeared. As the Quebec Pension Plan becomes more established, more women have been entitled to a pension in their own name. There remains, however, a spread of 28% among those who receive a retirement pension. I am sure that the data would be similar for the Canada Pension Plan.

• (1540)

The second graph shows the average retirement pension of women as a percentage of what men receive. Here again, we see that women have not yet caught up to men. In 2005, the women pensioners received 61% of the pensions received by men, and even the newly retired women only receive 64% of the amount that goes to their male counterparts. Strangely enough, as the plan matured, the percentage dropped because more and more women were entitled to the pension, but had interrupted their careers. So, until about 1992, the ratio dropped. It is rising now, but very slowly. There is still quite a gap.

Is there any chance that this gap will narrow in the near future? The answer is on the third graph. There again, we can see a difference. The graph represents contributors, people who are working and who therefore contribute to the Quebec Pension Plan. In 1980, women represented 50%, and they now represent 55%. So there has not really been an increase, while the percentage of men has dropped. There are fewer men in the labour force, either because they stay in school longer, or because they are retiring earlier. The last line, the one with the small blank squares, the line near the top, shows the ratio of female to male contributors. We see that after the first drop, the curve rises to another level, but remains at 82%. So there is still a gap of 20%.

The last graph, number four, uses the figures we have just seen, but they are distributed according to age. Here is the question: Can today's young people ever hope to catch up when they retire? The answer is no. Among those who are under 25 years of age, between 18 and 24, and they are represented on the first two lines, there isn't much of a difference between men and women in terms of the number of contributors, but women still contribute only 80% of the amount contributed by men. Between the ages of 25 and 55, women increase their contribution rate. They contribute 76%, 75%, while men contribute 85%. So, there again, we see a difference. When today's young workers retire, in 40 or 50 years, the gap will still be there. It won't be as great as it is now, for current generations, but it will nevertheless be there. Which leads me to conclude that women have made some progress, they have narrowed the gap, but they are still far from being equal.

I will come back to the first page, to the political options, and some recommendations that I would like to make. First, I think there should be measures to facilitate the conciliation of employment, education and family, in other words, something to help women escape poverty, by being part of the labour force. In order to do that, we must acknowledge the fact that they have families; we must provide measures that will help them to combine their work and responsibilities at home, and men should be eligible as well. The more programs we have, the greater the likelihood that men will also do their part, because what is good for families, and good for children, will lead us closer to equality. And as an added bonus, it will also be good for the environment.

The most important measures are maternity and parental benefits. I would also recommend a universal benefit and, with respect to employment insurance, an increase in the EI replacement rate. Canada could learn a great deal from what Quebec is doing. We also need good quality, universally accessible and affordable child care; there should also be support given to employers in order to promote

flexible working hours. We also need pay equity and affirmative action programs to ensure equality in the labour force, and, most importantly, we need good jobs, particularly in areas like the Maritimes, where women are less active in the labour force, not because they are lazy, but because there are no jobs for them.

• (1545)

We already provide a number of child benefits; we could do even more. There has been a great deterioration in social assistance programs in recent years. I think the federal government should provide more support. We also need improvements in public pension programs and employment insurance. What is most important is to improve accessibility for women, because they are the ones who were the most affected by the cuts in 1996.

We need credits to recognize unpaid caring for children and the elderly within the CPP/QPP.

Finally, the public health system must be strengthened in order to cover, for example, vision and dental care, prescription drugs, and home care.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rose.

Mr. Bernard Dussault.

Mr. Bernard Dussault (Senior Research and Communications Officer, Federal Superannuates National Association): Good afternoon and thank you for inviting me to appear before your committee. Even though there are not many men here today, I do not feel uncomfortable. I come from a family with four sisters, and I have met a lot of women in my lifetime.

The Chair: We have another man here: Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Bernard Dussault: I apologize if I gave the impression that I was the only one here; I see that I am not the only man, but there are not very many of us.

I was not chosen to represent my organization because of my deep understanding of women, but also because, like Ms. Rose, I do have some knowledge of public and private pension plans. I am a former chief actuary for the Canada Pension Plan and the public service superannuation plans. So, I subscribe to everything that she has already said. When it comes to the public service superannuation plan, the government, as the employer, could easily take into account the differences between men and women, because the public service pension is not a social program. You are probably already aware of the changes involving pay equity. A great deal has been done in that area and, as Ms. Rose said, there is still a gap, but it is narrower.

The main thing that I would like to bring to your attention today is the fact that, to a certain extent, nature has found a way to reward women for everything that they have contributed to the men in their lives, including, bearing their children and raising them. You can't put a price on that. Nature has rewarded them by allowing them to live longer than men. You are probably well aware of that, but it is a phenomenon that is nevertheless hard to explain. No matter how you look at it, this phenomenon will continue because as soon as they are born, women are destined to live longer. We will never be able to take that away from them. Nature is kind to women by allowing them to live longer, but that also causes problems because women become poorer as they age, and we have clear proof of that.

I have all of the figures here; I can prepare a report for you later. I apologize, I did not have time to prepare one beforehand. The Guaranteed Income Supplement program clearly demonstrates that not only are there more seniors who are women, but that they are becoming even poorer. Even if we project into 2050, and take into account the improvements made to the program, there will still be women who are poorer. The number might drop as we approach 2050, but some women will be poor, and if the forecasts bear out, 40% of senior women will be living under the poverty level. As you know, this is because women continue to earn less than men and because they will, for the most part, always be the ones who are responsible for raising their children. Their career will not be as long, so the phenomenon will continue to exist.

Not only will they earn a lower employment or pension income than men, but if their husband dies—and, usually, the husband is the first one to go, because they have a shorter life span—the woman will lose her access to health insurance. Their financial needs are great, and when it comes to health, that is an area that should be emphasized because it is so important. Good health is important to the quality of one's life.

Those are the main points that I wanted to make. I hope you found them helpful, and I would be delighted to answer your questions.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Dussault.

[English]

We'll go with the first round of seven minutes, starting with Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): I thank both of you for your presentation as well. A lot of what we're discussing today we already know, but we need to find ways of fixing it. Your graphs are very telling. They tell me, anyway, things that I think I already knew, but it's good to see them reinforced in your graphs and in some of your recommendations.

I have to start out by saying that since we're here talking about women's economic security, it is no amount of disappointment to know that we have just had a budget that doesn't address women at all, especially in terms of pensions.

An hon. member: On a point of order—

Hon. Maria Minna: No, I'm sorry. I have questions with respect to this. I think I have a right to say what I want to say.

The Chair: Finish, Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: I was going into specific things that we are talking about that address women's economic security, like pensions. We're talking about pension splitting. That leaves out single women, women who are the poorest. Senior women or unattached seniors, most of whom are women, are the largest group of poor seniors in our country, if I'm not mistaken—I think Madame Rose and Mr. Dussault can verify that or not after a while—and they are not going to be able to benefit any from that measure.

The GIS threshold has not been increased for I don't remember how many decades now, but I think it has been a very long time, since the fifties maybe. It has at least been thirty years or more, and

that's also a major factor with respect to the current senior women I'm talking about.

And then, of course, there's the issue of younger women who are now building up a pension and the need for drop-off rates.

So I wanted to ask, first of all, what measures either of you would recommend right now for current seniors who are having difficulty, and senior women specifically. And for young women who are entering the labour force or young adults now in the labour force, if we were to choose one or two major measures—because sometimes it's hard to do a lot—what would be the one or two that would have the major impact on helping women to eventually become more economically secure, especially in their senior years?

Ms. Ruth Rose: For elderly women, one of the things the women's movement in Quebec and across Canada has been requesting for a long time is recognition of the time they've spent taking care of children. We have some measures in the QPP and the Canada Pension Plan that do that, but one of the things we could think about doing is giving an extra supplement in old age security. Women are not going to be able to catch up even with measures specifically recognizing children, but there could be a universal measure, according to the number of children a woman raised, and that would be a supplement to the old age security.

Hon. Maria Minna: To follow on that point, I don't remember what it is now—it's \$6,000 or \$7,000—but perhaps we could take the personal exemption for the spouse that now exists in the tax system, say the stay-at-home parent, whether it's the male or female, although in most cases it's women. Instead of having it come off the tax as a reduction for the wage earner, that money could then be applied for the stay-at-home mom, either as an RRSP contribution or as a payment to the CPP or something of that nature, a pension. What do you think of that notion?

• (1555)

Ms. Ruth Rose: The purpose of that measure is to not tax the amount of money that is necessary for essential needs. While I would favour a measure that would give the value of that money to the woman herself in the form of a reimbursable tax credit, I don't think we should confuse it with old age pensions.

The trouble with increasing the GIS—and I think it was last increased in the 1980s—is that there's a very high tax-back of it, because every dollar that you earn above the old age security reduces the GIS by 50%. That means that the elderly with very low incomes are in fact taxed at a rate of something like 80%. That's why I recommend a supplement to the old age security, especially to reduce the inequality between men and women, to take account of the social contribution that they've made over their lifetime.

For younger women, I would recommend pay equity and job creation—especially the creation of good jobs—other than the kinds of cutbacks we've been having.

Mr. Bernard Dussault: For younger women, I would say that the target should be those who have children. There are a lot of ways to help families through family allowances or tax measures. Generally speaking, that's where the target should be, because these are the women who, because of their children, temporarily can't be in the workforce.

I have three other measures that affect more senior persons. I'll keep the most important one for the last. For those who can benefit from a pension plan, either themselves or from the survivor benefit from a spouse who worked in the private sector or the public sector, normally the survivor benefit consists of a surviving spouse allowance of about 50%. It seems that the 50% is not enough, so in this area improvements should be introduced. It's expensive, but this is where there are some ways of improving the economic standing of women.

The second one, which is at an even lower level of importance, pertains to the public sector pension plans. Most provisions of those plans are fair between men and women, except for a restriction that affects mainly women. We call it the marriage-after-retirement restriction, or marriage over age 60. Those who marry after retirement lose entitlement to the survivor pension.

This restriction does not exist in the CPP. It does not exist with the QPP. We—the Federal Superannuates National Association—been lobbying the government to remove that limit. Hopefully, eventually it will be removed.

On the last point I have to make, please keep in mind that it's personal. I'm not saying it on behalf of the FSNA; the FSNA has another position. I joined the association just three years ago and have not been able so far to convince them that this is the right target.

In 1996 the government proposed what's called a seniors benefit, which consisted mainly of transferring a portion of the OAS to the GIS. I'm much in favour of such an approach, so much in favour that if it were just for me, I would convert totally all the money paid through OAS into GIS.

Mrs. Rose mentioned that although the GIS is a very nice program, the level of poverty is set so that even if you receive this level, you're still in poverty. You live in a manner that can easily be qualified as miserable.

That's my main point. If there were a way to come back to the seniors benefit and reintroduce it in the House and even strengthen it, I would support it 100%.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

You have seven minutes, Ms. Deschamps.

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

I would like to start by welcoming you and thanking you for being here today.

I've had an opportunity to travel around Quebec twice. The purpose of the first trip was to present the bill currently being studied by the committee, which is designed to improve the employment

insurance system. Through our travels, we consulted with various groups and saw very clearly that women are extremely affected by the current employment insurance system. I'm thinking of women who are single parents and women who were about to be eligible for a pension, but were continuing to work in the hope that their pension would increase somewhat.

In the context of our study on the status of women, my colleague and I also met with a number of women's groups. They told us they suffered from discrimination in the measures introduced by the government. Often, these women do not choose to remain at home. For example, when they choose to have children, they take themselves out of the labour market and consequently, are not eligible for some measures that would guarantee their future security.

Ms. Rose, the paper we received about pensions states that you do not expect the gap between men and women to be filled in the next 40 years. Can you give us more clarification on this? In your opinion, what could be done to try to reduce the huge gap between men and women?

• (1600)

Ms. Ruth Rose: This is a major problem that needs to be addressed. We could increase all retirement income, particularly for women, by improving public plans. Women have less access to private plans, except if they have worked in the public sector, because generally speaking, there are fewer and fewer private pension plans.

I would therefore be in favour of an improvement along these lines, and even of doubling the QPP and the CPP. I would also be in favour of recognizing the work done by women in raising children, either through Old Age Security, the Quebec Pension Plan or the Canada Pension Plan.

In addition, I would like to disagree with what Mr. Dussault said. I did not say that I was in favour of the Guaranteed Income Supplement, or with the Seniors' Benefit that the Mulroney government had put forward, precisely because that would have meant the tax rate of very low-income families would be 80%. All the people who had invested in RRSPs would have lost this money once they retired. In fact, this is why the program was abandoned.

There must be investment in universal programs, because women can rely on them. The Guaranteed Income Supplement and income-dependent programs are such that as soon as a person's income increases, he or she is no longer entitled to them, and it becomes very difficult. It becomes a poverty cap: people have to be here or there, but if they are somewhere in between, there is always a downward levelling.

The only way to help retired women under the circumstances is to have different types of recognition of the work they do with children, and, increasingly, with their aging parents. There are still many women who leave the labour market or reduce their hours of work in order to look after their aging parents.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Would you like to add something, Mr. Dussault?

Mr. Bernard Dussault: I apologize for misinterpreting what you said.

In support of what I said about the Guaranteed Income Supplement, the points you make are correct, but I nevertheless think that this plan is ideal in the medium term because when people have income, they are covered by the plan, but only at the rate of 50%. So there remains some

• (1605)

[English]

incentive to go back to work, even if some part of the benefit is reduced. I think this is the best way to deal with poverty.

She mentioned unemployment insurance. It pops into my mind that a good program to help families with children would be to give them a higher unemployment benefit. This is one of the problems, if I may say, that having children brings to women. They can't do both things at one time. In my view, it's preferable that the mother stays at home. She should not be financially penalized for that. The unemployment insurance program might be a good program to use for that purpose. It's not the only one, but it's a very good one.

The Chair: Madame Deschamps?

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Merci.

We will go to Ms. Smith for seven minutes.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you. I'm going to split my time with Mr. Stanton today.

The Chair: He has more time.

Mrs. Joy Smith: He's got more time? Oh, that's great. We want to make sure that all four of us have a chance to ask questions. Well, that's good.

I want to thank both of you for coming to the status of women committee today. Thank you so much for your insightful comments and recommendations.

Mr. Dussault, my first question is to you. We have found, in government, that income splitting is very beneficial for a lot of the senior population. Could I please have your opinion on that, along with an explanation of why that is so, or why not?

Mr. Bernard Dussault: Pension splitting is important because it corrects one of the aspects of the tax system that was not fair. If you have two couples, one in which there's only one wage earner and the other in which the two are working, and the total family income is the same—\$60,000 in one case, which just one person earns, and in the other one both spouses work and each earns \$30,000—then the single wage-earner family would pay more taxes than the other family. That's to explain what splitting does.

But the new measure is just in respect to pensions. It would have been much more expensive to apply it to all income, but my view is that it should be applied to all income. It would be much more expensive, but I think it's still affordable. Fairness has no price. There's some limit, of course, because there are a lot of things that are not fair in society. But this is an area that could be simply resolved by applying splitting not only to pensions but also to salaries.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Thank you for your comments.

Right now we have implemented that policy. You're saying you think it's very beneficial. What more can be done in that area? If you want, you could elaborate a little bit. You touched on it briefly in your answer.

As you know, in any kind of budget there are many challenges. But we do have a concern about the aging demographic across our nation. So could you comment a little bit more on that issue?

Mr. Bernard Dussault: I don't know really what more I could say. But I want to make it clear that what was announced in the budget yesterday is only in respect to splitting of pensions. So the salaries or the active income are not concerned. I don't know, in that respect, what else I could say. I don't know if you want me to go beyond....

Mrs. Joy Smith: No, that's fine. We're studying the economic challenges that women, in particular, have.

In your presentation today you were talking about the seniors benefit and about the merits that could apply to senior women, so I want to go back to that in a minute. But could you also comment on the CPP? I understand you've had some involvement with that.

• (1610)

Mr. Bernard Dussault: Yes. Maybe to your surprise I will tell you that I'm not the only one considering that; most actuaries do.

This is the best-designed pension plan in the world. It has a lot of what could be called poverty-related measures. Mrs. Rose referred to one of those. There are some other ones. For example, there's an exemption on the contributions for the first \$3,500 of earnings. And there's a drop-off provision for years during which a contributor was raising kids under age seven.

I think there's a limit beyond which a program like the CPP could have more poverty measures. I wouldn't mind if they would introduce more. But we have to also keep in mind that this is not a totally poverty-related program. It's an earnings-related program that includes some poverty measures. So I don't see how, at this time, it could be further improved in that respect.

Sorry for this.

Mrs. Joy Smith: No. That's really good to know. I'm glad you mentioned that.

How much time do I have left?

The Chair: Two minutes.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Shall I finish off, and then you start with the next one? Perhaps we'll split your time.

I'm going to ask you another question, going back to the seniors benefit. What about the program do you think would be the first thing that could be put forward for a seniors benefit program that would immediately address the senior women's poverty issue? You know the plan very well, obviously, for you to be addressing it today. What is the first thing in that benefit plan that you think would be the most beneficial to put forward as quickly as possible?

Mr. Bernard Dussault: It was implicitly covered in the point I made earlier by proposing that the seniors benefit be reintroduced and strengthened. In other words, it means that the threshold of poverty used for the program for the existing guaranteed income supplement needs to be increased. We don't know if it actually exists or what the threshold of poverty is, but the amount used for that purpose in the program should be increased.

On an individual basis, with the program, I think the minimum is something like \$13,000 to \$14,000 per year. I'm sure nobody here needs an explanation that this is really miserable in terms of income. If it's the only thing you have, you really cannot live in a decent manner on \$14,000.

I don't know if I'm answering your question, but the point is to raise this poverty level.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Smith.

We next go to Ms. Mathysen.

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

Thank you very much for being here.

I'd like to start with Madam Rose and explain something to you that I've been working on and thinking about in connection with some of the barriers women face. For example, single moms who are receiving the child tax credit have recently run into the problem of having the child tax credit removed and are being told they have to repay the child tax credit, because CRA has decided they may be cohabiting. They're in a position where they have to prove that they're not. They have to provide three pieces of proof from friends, landlords, and their children's schools to show they're not cohabiting, and they have to provide three pieces of information stating the same from an ex-partner. You can imagine that in the case of ex-partners who are not on friendly terms, it could be very difficult. We've been advocating for these women on their behalf at CRA.

It seems to me that it might make more sense to have an advocate within various government agencies, someone who women could turn to. Would such an advocate be helpful in terms of seniors and in terms of addressing this issue of women confronting their economic problems?

Ms. Ruth Rose: You're raising another problem that has to do with programs that are targeted to low-income people. It's based on family income. Therefore, when there are two incomes, you lose very large parts of it.

One of the ways that would help to deal with it would be to lower the clawback rates. One of the problems with the child tax benefit is that if you have three children or more, for every \$1,000 you earn, you lose \$330 of your child tax benefit, plus 5% of your GST tax, plus you're paying taxes. People in those income categories often have tax rates of 80% to 90%. I think one thing the federal government could very easily do, which would benefit almost all middle-class families, would be to lower the tax-back rates, the clawback rates on the child tax benefit.

It's the same thing for the GIS. As I said, there's a 50% clawback rate that adds to tax rates, and it's the main problem with it being used as a poverty measure.

In terms of the application, well, there's no easy way to do it. Of course, the provinces are most often faced with the problem of whether or not they are cohabiting. I know Quebec has introduced a one-year rule and the cohabitation must be for 12 continuous months. It means that very short-term relationships do not have penalties.

Obviously, any kind of an ombudsman or a mechanism that gives support to women who are faced with that situation would be helpful.

• (1615)

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: In your remarks you talked about child care and maternity and parental benefits being helpful in terms of addressing women's poverty.

A national housing program is something I would very much like to see. Would this help the economic situation for women? How important is it?

Ms. Ruth Rose: When you look around the world at countries that have low rates of poverty, particularly for single mothers, they have high rates of labour force participation. That's why I think that while we want women and men to be able to take care of their children, the most important poverty-fighting measure we can have for women is keeping their feet in the labour market when they have small children. That's why child care and maternity benefits are so important. When you're on maternity leave you maintain your relationship with your employer, and you maintain your income.

I also agree that the federal government could provide leadership and direct funding in the area of housing. In the Scandinavian countries, rather than having welfare or social assistance programs, they have housing programs. That means that when people are working at low incomes they also get support and are less likely to need to go on social assistance. There's a greater gap between social assistance and working at a low wage. I would be in favour of a housing program.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Okay, thank you very much.

Monsieur Dussault, in the budget we heard yesterday there's an extension to age 71 for contributions by seniors to their RRSPs and RIFs. My concern is about whether seniors, particularly women in lower income levels, can afford RRSPs. I wonder if you can comment on that.

Mr. Bernard Dussault: The measure that was announced yesterday raising the age from 69 to 71 to wait before withdrawing RRSPs is beneficial to those who have higher levels of income. So it definitely does nothing for those who have poverty-related measures.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: You spoke about pension splitting. We know that pension splitting is beneficial to couples with disparities in income. I wonder if you can comment on the impact of pension splitting on older single women. What effect does that have?

Mr. Bernard Dussault: It has no effect at all—just like RRSPs benefit people in some situations. It does not benefit single women at all. It's not damaging to them, but it does nothing for single persons.

• (1620)

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Is there a remedy to that?

Mr. Bernard Dussault: Any poverty-related problems that people have should not prevent the government from implementing measures like pension splitting, which was implemented yesterday. Whatever poverty problems exist should be addressed one way or another.

I mentioned the GIS earlier. There may be some other way, but once someone is in old age I don't see that anything other than the GIS could do the job. We don't have the same degree of approval for this program, but when you look at the GIS as something that increases your tax measures—I could compare it to looking at a glass as being half full or half empty. Forget the taxes. For people earning below the poverty level—let's say \$15,000—it does not remove anything from those who earn more than \$15,000 and those who earn less. Their earnings are not brought above \$15,000, so I don't see what problem there is with this program. It just does good.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Ruth Rose: I have one little comment on Madam Mathysen's question.

If you allowed spouses to split the CPP while they were still alive, when the husband died the woman would have a higher pension of her own, and the combined pension and survivor's benefit would be higher in that case. That would also move toward fairness between couples.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Let me begin by apologizing for coming in late. I'm sorry, as I was at another meeting.

I want to follow up on Ms. Mathysen's question on income splitting. Ms. Rose, you just proposed a solution, but I'm very concerned.

You have a hypothetical couple over 80 years old, with a joint income of \$65,000 or \$70,000, let's say. One spouse dies, and usually it's the male spouse who dies earlier, and the woman is left alone. When there are two of them living together they split their income from their pensions and their tax rate is lower. He dies, which is the more preponderant case—men dying before women—and she is left alone, her income falls, but her tax rate increases.

Do you have suggestions of what in public policy a government can do to try to address what I see as a huge inequity for senior women? We're here to talk about the economic security of women. I think this potentially seriously undermines the economic security of older women, who get lulled into a certain lifestyle that vanishes when a spouse dies.

Ms. Ruth Rose: Well, first of all, I want to remark that a couple with \$65,000 in retirement income is already in the top 15% or 20%

Hon. Anita Neville: Whatever the income is.

Ms. Ruth Rose: —except that after he dies, she will have survivor benefits and whatever her own income is. If her income is below

\$35,000, she's going to be taxed at the lowest rate anyhow, so that's not my primary concern.

I also want to say that I think income splitting for people who are still active is a major obstacle to women re-entering the labour force, because they will be taxed at their husband's tax rate. While that's not as much of a concern for people who are retired....

Don't forget, also, that we give additional tax advantages to the elderly, so they in fact are paying less tax on the same income as younger people, because we expect them to have, for example, more medical expenses and so forth. So that would not be a major concern on my part.

• (1625)

Hon. Anita Neville: Could you expand on your comment that it would inhibit them from entering the workforce?

Ms. Ruth Rose: Suppose you have a man who earns \$100,000 and his wife is at home with the children. Indeed, in Sweden, they say that only rich men can afford to have women at home—a wife at home. But if you have income splitting, she would be taxed at \$50,000 and he would be taxed at \$50,000, meaning that if she goes back into the labour market, she will be taxed at the second level of taxation, which I think is 22% now, whereas in the current situation, she's taxed at the lowest rate, which is 15.5%.

Again, if there are measures giving women at home money for child care, and they go back into the labour market, lose that money and have to pay for child care, that's a major obstacle. The problem, as we know, is that while it's very nice when a woman is living with a man who earns \$100,000, if they separate and she's on her own, that's when we get low-income single mothers. So I think we want policy to be directed towards keeping women in the labour market.

Also, there's been a considerable amount of study showing that child care is not only not bad for children, but also that good quality child care is good for children. Again, we want women and men to be able to keep their children in child care, but not for 60 hours a week, but maybe for 30 hours a week, as it's an educational experience for the child and it allows good parenting as well.

Hon. Anita Neville: Could you comment, Mr. Dussault, on whether you have....

Do I have time?

The Chair: Yes, you have ten seconds.

Hon. Anita Neville: Oh, well, I'll come back, then. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We go to Ms. Davidson for five minutes.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thank you.

Thank you very much to both of you for your presentations this afternoon. I think, as with other subjects we've studied, it becomes more apparent as we get into it that there are no easy solutions for most of these issues.

I just want to go back to a couple of things you referred to. First of all, Mr. Dussault, I think you talked about the survivor spousal benefit and how it is often in fact cut to 50% if the insured spouse passes away. Is that correct?

Mr. Bernard Dussault: Yes.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Is that something that can be changed or can be easily changed? Can you comment more on that?

Mr. Bernard Dussault: It can be changed, but there's a cost to it, and the cost is high, both marginally and absolutely—absolutely in the sense that a pension plan by itself is already something that is very expensive. So to add to it is not easy, because a 50% survivor benefit is already quite expensive, so to increase it increases the cost of something that's already quite expensive.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: I want to ask you about a couple of other options. As well as the normal pension plan, there are other pension plans that are defined contributions. Is that something that's available to very many people? Because under those, the surviving spouse gets 100% of the benefit. You don't lose anything on those.

Mr. Bernard Dussault: Yes, but with the defined contribution plan there is no explicit survivor benefit. There is one, as you say, because there are some assets left, but the later you die, the lower are the remaining assets, so it's not—

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: But can the defined contribution not be set up so it generates an income very similar or equal to what a defined benefit pension does?

Mr. Bernard Dussault: There is always a way, but a defined contribution benefit is normally designed this way to be simple. So basically, it's not designed for that purpose. But there's always a way to deal with that. Each individual would have to do something with it personally by setting a portion of the amount withdrawn each year. But in a general way, it's not possible to do that with a defined contribution.

• (1630)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: But there are large companies in this country that do that for their employees. Petro-Canada is one of them.

Mr. Bernard Dussault: What does it do, exactly?

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: It manages the plans for them. It manages the defined contribution plan, the same way a defined benefit plan can be managed, and you have the option, at retirement, of either taking that money and managing it yourself through your own financial advisor or of having the company continue to manage it. And it's managed by very astute companies that do this; they're not just managed by anyone.

Is this an option we could perhaps see more companies becoming involved in?

Mr. Bernard Dussault: Well, what I understand from what you're saying is that what the company does is not manage the plans to make its design more palatable for the survivors; it's just a matter of investments. It's my understanding that in lieu of the employee, they

decide where and how the amounts will be invested, but if that's correct, then it doesn't do anything more or less for survivors.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Well, it does. They manage the investment portion of it, but you can also set it up so you have your payouts managed, as well, whether they're set up as annuities or whatever, so you get a—

Mr. Bernard Dussault: Okay, the only thing I know in that respect is that some defined contribution plans allow the employee's contribution to be put in a spousal plan. But otherwise, I'm sorry, I'm not aware that some employers would go beyond that. I was not aware of that.

Ms. Ruth Rose: May I say something on that? My understanding of a defined contribution plan is that it's very much like an RRSP. That is, when you retire, you must make a choice as to what your payout is, and provincial laws as well as federal laws require that at that point, you make a choice as to whether there will be a spousal prolongation, that is, a joint survivor benefit. And when you get into that situation, you're in very much the same situation as you are in with the defined benefit plan. The difference is that for the defined contribution, what you get out of the defined contribution—your annuity and so forth—depends on what interest rates are at the time you retire, whereas defined benefits give you a guaranteed amount of money based on what the plan provides.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you very much for being here, Ms. Rose and Mr. Dussault. I have a great deal of admiration for the work you do, Ms. Rose. I am more familiar with it. I have not met you before, Mr. Dussault.

I often wonder what we as politicians are doing to really improve things for people. When I was a little girl, my father always told me that it was not the end of the world to make mistakes, that we had to get up again and to continue moving forward. He thought it was important to acknowledge one's mistakes. I have always kept that in mind.

And I often wonder why the government does not have the same attitude. Some policies were introduced in good faith, but have not produced the results they were supposed to produce, because they were not the appropriate instruments to improve things for people. I wonder why, when a certain party is in power—and I can speak freely here, because the Bloc Québécois will never be in power—the government, whatever its political stripe, cannot admit that it made a mistake, and say that it will drop the policy in question and introduce one that will work better. I think that for women, economic security begins when they are young, not at age 60 or 75.

There were two policies mentioned in yesterday's budget, and I would like to know whether you think they might help women enjoy better economic security. One of the measures is an income supplement for people earning more than \$3,000, but less than \$21,167. Another is a child tax credit of \$2,000.

Do you think these measures will really help women who are lone parents and all other women to have a better economic situation when they are older?

• (1635)

Ms. Ruth Rose: I admit I was very disappointed by the child tax credit, because it is non-refundable. However, the budget documents show that people earning less than \$30,000 a year will receive absolutely nothing, whether they are lone-parent families—and most of them have an income of less than \$30,000—or families where there are two parents. The government can still change its budget; I therefore hope that it will convert this credit into a refundable credit, so that all families can really benefit from it.

The earned income supplement is a measure that has been in place for a long time in places such as the United States and Quebec. In Quebec, it is somewhat more generous. The most important thing, however, is that after having a very similar program for years, the government is now going further in the income scales and is recovering this income at a rate of 10% rather than 15%.

I'm not opposed to this measure. It may help some people on low incomes, particularly the heads of lone-parent families, but the fact remains that it is a rather modest measure that involves some administrative problems. Women earning less than \$21,000 who have one child will get nothing. There again, I would have preferred a direct benefit for children and an improvement in benefits for all low-income families.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you very much, Ms. Rose.

Mr. Dussault, earlier, you spoke about a case where a woman had married someone who was already receiving a public service pension.

If the spouse receiving the benefits dies, his widow is no longer entitled to benefits. Is that correct?

Mr. Bernard Dussault: Let me describe a typical case for you. A married man who worked for the public service retires and begins receiving benefits. His wife dies. If this man remarries, his new wife, unlike the first one, will not be entitled to half of his pension because the second marriage took place after the man retired.

Ms. Nicole Demers: So his first wife would have been entitled to 50%.

Mr. Bernard Dussault: Yes, that is correct.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Merci.

We now go to Ms. Mathysen for five minutes.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have a quick question with regard to the disparities between levels of government. For example, the federal parental benefit is

one year, but provincially regulated child care centres won't take children until they're 18 months of age. Is there, do you think, a need for better cooperation between the levels of government, and how would that cooperation assist women in terms of their economic security? Have you given much thought to that disparity?

Ms. Ruth Rose: Some child care centres will take children at nine months. Some won't take them until they're potty-trained.

Of course, we need a national child care program that makes child care accessible and affordable to everybody. Back in the 19th century we asked whether the government should be paying for education for all children, and we answered the question long-term. In particular, Quebec was one of the last provinces to adopt it. We said we want all our children to be educated.

We should be at that point now with child care. All of our children need the care but they also need the educational experience. One of the most expensive things is for infants, because they need a high staff-to-child ratio. But we're a rich country; we can afford it.

• (1640)

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: I quite agree.

You talked about salary discrimination in your remarks. I know that you've written and spoken about the fight for salary equality being far from won.

We've got a complaints-based pay equity system or model at work in the country. I'm wondering how you would compare that to a proactive pay equity program that was advocated by a special committee in 2005.

Ms. Ruth Rose: Quebec has one. Ontario had one. I'm absolutely in favour. The problem is that with the complaint-based situation, because a model of evaluation to establish what is comparable worth is fairly complicated, the burden of the proof is on the group or the individual who filed the complaint. And the experience on both the federal and Quebec levels when we had only the complaint-based was that it took 15 or 20 years to solve these cases, and that was in the public sector, where there were very strong unions fighting for it.

The experience we've had in Quebec as well is that while the unionized sector has made considerable progress in getting pay equity implemented and the child care sector also—and it was true in Ontario too, where they managed to get government to recognize that this was a publicly subsidized area and therefore the government was responsible for pay equity—there has been relatively little progress in the private sector.

So we need not only proactive pay equity plans, and I think the federal government needs to go ahead with this and show leadership, but we also need considerable work to provide the instruments and the mechanisms of enforcement for the non-unionized sector.

In countries like Sweden or Australia, which have reduced the pay gap between men and women, the reason they've done it is because they have nationwide bargaining and they reduce salary differentials across the board for everybody. That's a way to attack poverty.

The Chair: You have about half a minute.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Then I'll be very quick.

We heard from rural women that they face incredible challenges with regard to isolation because they don't have access to public transit, and we haven't seen much in terms of a real investment in the kind of public transit that would make a difference both to the environment and to women's ability to access services and have some freedom.

I wonder if you have given much thought to the transit question.

Ms. Ruth Rose: I admit that, for environmental reasons, we should be involved in various kinds of public transportation. Maybe a subsidized taxi system is what you need in the rural areas. I know that even in small towns, women can't take jobs because they can't get to work, so of course we have to work in those areas.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will go to Mr. Stanton for five minutes.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to our panellists this afternoon.

I have a couple of questions. The first is to Madame Rose. In the brief you gave us today, one of the bullet points in your observations is that while you recognize the gap is diminishing between men and women in terms of labour force participation and so on, you note that the wage gap is due in large part to wage discrimination. How do you qualify that?

In our studies on gender-based analysis, some of the early findings we had from a Statistics Canada panel in our opening meeting on this topic suggested that in fact things are coming together. Based on the wage rate gap, we're up to about 86% and continuing to narrow. What do you have that would qualify that statement—that it's still based on discrimination?

• (1645)

Ms. Ruth Rose: There's a huge economic literature on this question, and of course there are disagreements. One of the reasons women earn less than men is that they are more likely not only to work part time, but also, when they're working full time, to work fewer hours. It's related to the problem of the sexual division of labour, but I wouldn't call that wage discrimination.

What we find—and this is what the pay equity applications do—is that when you actually go down and evaluate the kinds of jobs women do—for example, secretarial work or certain kinds of manufacturing—on an objective set of factors, we're still finding gaps of the order of 10% to 15%, which is not the entire.... That's why I used the qualification “to a large extent”; I didn't say “entirely” due to wage discrimination.

The evidence from the economic studies is that there are still prejudices and historical distortions of the value of the service jobs that women do, and that they are still not paid for comparable worth.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: We have seen some positive signs there, and that's why I raise it. We've seen in the public sector, for example, that in the case of women under the age of 35, when you look at just the wage gap, it is now down to 2%. That is not to say there aren't differences in earnings because of the choices and the availability for women to participate in the workforce, although that is even increasing. There has been some terrific improvement.

I want to move on. One of the other graphs you have here—I think it was graph 3—pertained to the contributions. This is the RRQ. I'm not familiar with that term. Is that the Quebec Pension Plan?

Ms. Ruth Rose: That's the Quebec Pension Plan.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: If you look at the graph, you notice that admittedly there is a gap, but since 1998 the graph for contributions by women continues to grow. You indicated it hasn't grown by much; I note that it has grown by about 10% since 1998, whereas the men's contribution rate has stayed relatively flat. It has gone up somewhat.

When you consider all the other factors that are coming into play, such as greater women's participation in the workforce, a decreasing wage rate gap, and all of these other factors—we even heard, for example, that women's participation in postgraduate studies is soaring relative to men—and if you were to project those lines forward, taking all these things into consideration, wouldn't it be reasonable to conclude that the projection is going to continue to go forward and close, so that major interventions of public policy really shouldn't be necessary there?

Ms. Ruth Rose: That's why I put down graph 4. When you look at it by age group, we find that yes, under 25, women and men are contributing about at the same level. But the women's wages, even at that age—even at between 20 and 24—are still only 84% of men's. Then when you get into the childbearing ages—that is, between 25 and 50—there's still a gap between the percentage of men and the percentage of women who are contributing, on the order of 5%, and again women are contributing only at 85% of what men are contributing.

The gap is still quite considerably larger for the older women. That's a legacy from the past, and that's where we're going to see more closing, particularly as the labour market gets tighter and there are more jobs for people over 50.

But the projection you can get from graph 4 is that 40 years from now women will still have pensions that are 15% lower because they have 15% lower wages and 5% lower because they've been 5% less on the labour market; therefore, their pensions will be still 20% lower than those of men. That's in 40 years; that's when your daughter will be retiring.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you.

We go to round three and we'll probably be able to do two questions.

Ms. Minna, you'll have five minutes.

Hon. Maria Minna: Thank you. I wanted to ask one question.

We're discussing women's economic security today, and pay equity and the equality of women, and so on. Recently, the Status of Women Canada mandate was changed so that the equality provisions were removed. I'm wondering whether, Ms. Rose, you could tell us whether you think that is premature, given what we are discussing here today, and what you would do with it.

Ms. Ruth Rose: Absolutely. I think women have made progress. You must also note, and I should have answered this to Mr. Stanton, that unfortunately one of the reasons why the gap between men and women has been closing—two-thirds of that closing—has been through reduction in male wages. This was particularly strong between 1996 and 2001. It was less true between 2001 and 2006.

So yes, I would say that women still need to fight for equality. They still need help with that. Especially if we're looking for a saner, more human, more ecological world, we would like men to adopt more the attitude towards labour force and money and children that women have. If people produced more of their own services and consumed less in material goods and had more time for family, there would be greater equality, and we'd have a better quality of life.

Hon. Maria Minna: I have a comment and two questions for both of you.

The first comment is that while I understand that income splitting is accepted, and I know the FSN and others are seeing it as beneficial, from the point of view of fairness, even if it were \$50,000—a couple is making \$50,000 through pensions, and the female or an individual is making \$50,000—that means the individual is paying higher taxes. I think from the point of fairness, it is not quite a fair way to do taxation. Maybe you can comment along the way. That's a comment more than anything.

I have two specific questions. Both of you talked about pension sharing, one way or another. What about pension splitting? I'm not talking about income splitting, but pension splitting, such as CPP, RSPs, anything that is subsidized in any way by government being split at the time the pension is starting to be drawn. Obviously at divorce now we do it, but at the time.... So it would be 50-50 for both the male and the female. At least the woman is receiving more money in her hands right from the beginning rather than right through. That's one question: whether you could tell me what you think of that.

Ms. Rose, your last two graphs show that couples are doing better than single men or single women among seniors, as well as two-parent families. One of the things you've suggested a number of times today is that what I call "early education and child care"—because early childhood development is not about babysitting—is a major factor, and then increasing the women in the labour force.

There is a philosophy that would suggest going the other way around, keeping the women at home—that they should be at home if they're having children. Can you expand more on why you're going in the opposite direction, and what some of the philosophy is, and in

fact some of the government's own planning, that tends to favour stay-at-home moms as opposed to those who go to work?

That's two. Maybe you can expand on those two things.

Ms. Ruth Rose: If you're looking for equality for women, the only way they're going to attain equality is by being in the labour market. The problem with a stay-at-home mom is that there is a lot of psychological experience that in fact they're not being very happy and they're not necessarily being very good mothers. But the important thing is that they're necessarily dependent partly on the government, perhaps, because there may be subsidies from the government, but they're mainly dependent on a husband. That means they're also losing experience and losing contacts in the labour market. If the marriage breaks up—and we still have very high divorce rates—that's when we get low-income single mothers who are not equipped to regain their autonomy. The people who are most in favour of stay-at-home mothers are the ones who are most aggressive against welfare mothers, but they go hand in hand.

Back in 1936, Alva Myrdal, in Sweden, introduced maternity leave, not so much to allow mothers to maintain their income as to allow working women—because at that time women had to work in Sweden if they wanted not to be poor—to have children.

Our experience in Quebec now that we have the new maternity program, which is a year old, is that we have increased the birth rate by something like 7,200 babies a year, and it's still going up, and we've increased the labour force participation rate of women. It's the only way to prevent poverty.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will go to Mr. Stanton for five minutes.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

To Mr. Dussault, through your presentation I was interested in your comments that upon the death of the spouse there's a first survivor. Usually the woman in the household is the survivor; the man passes away first. And clearly within the public pension plan, the survivor benefit, I think you said, is 50%, and that's my recollection as well.

But in light of the fact that there are other assets, in the case where the man passes away, any assets—family assets, real estate, other things—essentially go to the surviving spouse tax-free. Madam Neville made an interesting point about the fact that the surviving spouse gets jacked up into a higher tax bracket and that there is a change in financial circumstance as well.

I would see to some extent that in terms of living in poverty, the financial circumstance because of all the family assets coming to the surviving spouse wouldn't necessarily be launching them into a period of more poverty than what they had before.

Perhaps I'm just way off on this, but maybe you could clarify that a little bit for me or add some insight.

Mr. Bernard Dussault: You're totally right if you look just at the financial aspects you mentioned, but we have to keep in mind that when a spouse leaves the family, the remaining spouse is left doing the things that the other spouse was doing, and this has a cost. For example, the surviving lady cannot take care of all the things that used to be done physically, at no cost, by the man, so there is a cost. So 50% might look correct, but there are additional costs when a spouse dies, and that's one of the aspects.

The other point is that the financial situation of each family is so different.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Of course.

Mr. Bernard Dussault: On average, it seems that 50% is not enough.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Okay.

One of the announcements that came out yesterday in budget 2007 was something called a working-income benefit. This was particularly addressed to people in low-income situations.

I realize this might fall a little bit outside the realm of pensioners, for example, but you seem to have a good basic knowledge about public income support systems. The proposal was essentially that there is a benefit for working individuals who are in that very low-income sphere, that bracket between \$3,000 and \$12,000 in annual income, that in fact they would be eligible for an annual benefit of up to \$500, which I think is the maximum, and within that range between \$5,500 and \$9,000, they'd get the full \$500.

Do you see that as something that would help when we're looking at the economic security issues, particularly as it relates to single moms and you add on top of that the additional child tax benefit of \$310 that they would receive as well? Do we see some positives in that announcement?

• (1700)

Mr. Bernard Dussault: The obvious positive is that it's a good poverty-related measure, but I don't know who would benefit more from it. You mentioned single moms. But there are a lot of people who would fall into that category, and they're not necessarily women or women with children.

I really can't tell you more than that. It's a good measure. Obviously, it's not bad.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to the last questioner, Madame Deschamps.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Thank you.

People say that economic security promotes not only tolerance and a feeling of well-being, but that it is also beneficial for social growth and stability. That is all well and good, but the fact remains that poverty still exists and that women are the most likely people to be poor.

Ms. Rose, can you tell me whether Canada has introduced any policies to fight poverty following the Beijing Conference on women in 1995?

Ms. Ruth Rose: I must admit that Canada has made some progress, particularly in the area of child benefits. There has been a significant improvement in the amounts given to families. Quebec has also invested a great deal in this. However, this is unfortunately not true with the other provinces. Extending maternity benefits to 50 weeks is also another big step forward. I would say that those may be the two most significant measures. There is very little movement in the area of child care services, except in Quebec. Of course, there has been a great deal of progress in women's participation in the labour market and in education, particularly at the university level. We have seen some reduction in poverty, but there remains a great deal to be done.

I apologize, but I had forgotten to answer Ms. Mathysen's question about pension splitting.

[English]

I would be in favour of the splitting of pensions. We do it in divorces. Why not also do it at retirement?

It would also mean that if the husband died before the woman, she would get an equality of treatment that would be relative to what would happen if he died. It means single men would probably have somewhat lower incomes, but it would equalize post-widowhood for men and women.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'd like to thank the witness for being here. We appreciate that you came here to provide us with your insight. I think we all had a fruitful discussion. Thank you again for being here and for travelling to be here.

I'd like to suspend the meeting for one minute and go to committee business.

• _____ (Pause) _____
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The Chair:

I'm resuming the meeting, because Mr. Dussault would like to add something.

Mr. Bernard Dussault: I would like to add to an answer that I gave to one of the first questions that was asked on what can be done to alleviate poverty or to help improve the conditions of women. There are two other means that crossed my mind in the meantime. It's not that they are new, but I forgot to mention them.

In terms of poverty, one means of alleviating poverty would be to extend the guaranteed income supplement downward. It applies only to persons age 65 and over. I think it was once thought in the government that it would apply at all ages. It would be one means.

The other means rests on the fact that it's not clear to everybody that fewer than 50% of employers have a pension plan for their employees. It's why the CPP was introduced. It was introduced a long time ago, and it's still fewer than 50% of employers who have an independent pension plan. There would be a case for the government to either have employers obliged to have a pension plan or to increase the scope of the CPP.

Thanks.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

The meeting is suspended.

• _____ (Pause) _____
•

The Chair: The meeting has resumed.

We have before us a notice of motion. I'd like Ms. Mathysen to move the motion, please.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Shall I read it, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Yes, please.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: The motion says:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), That the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women recommend that the Government publish all outstanding research projects from Status of Women Canada's Independent Policy Research Fund and that the chair report the adoption of this motion to the House forthwith.

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen, would you like to explain why you've brought this motion?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Basically, Madam Chair, I had heard from a number of women's organizations that they had done valuable research that had almost come to fruition and simply needed to be translated and finally published, but they had been notified that the research would not be published. In a meeting with the minister on February 22, I believe, I raised this with her. She indicated that it was the intention of Status of Women Canada to indeed publish and finish all materials that were outstanding and to make sure the research was available.

I did get back to those groups, those individuals, and they indicated that they had received a letter from the deputy minister indicating that their work would not be published. I have sought clarification on that. Because this is valuable work that the taxpayers have already supported, I think it's important that it be published and made available.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any discussion?

Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Thank you.

When the motion came out, we were pondering why this motion was here. In actual fact, three reports have been completed and five are online, on the website. Ten are not going to be published because they're not complete and there's not enough information.

Also, for next week, we will bring a copy of all the names of the reports and everything so that the committee can see them.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Of course we will be supporting this motion, Ms. Mathysen. It talks about outstanding research projects from Status of Women Canada's Policy Research Fund, although we know that some research projects have been interrupted, and thus are no longer outstanding. If we use the word "outstanding", there is a danger that these projects that have been interrupted will not be part of the list you are requesting.

That is my only question, Madam Chair, because there is a reference to the outstanding research projects.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen, do you have a response to that?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: I would welcome that amendment, inasmuch as I'm sure there was a great deal of very good research that would be lost if those projects didn't proceed.

The Chair: Ms. Minna, and then Ms. Smith.

Hon. Maria Minna: Just as a point of clarification from Ms. Mathysen, are these reports that you're referring to in the motion reports that have been completed or partially completed? Are there some that are partially completed? I'm just trying to get a handle on what we're doing.

• (1710)

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: In the original motion, these were reports that were essentially completed. They did need to be translated and then published by SWC, but the authors were told that would not happen. In my conversation with the minister, she assured me that was not the case, so I think a clarification about this is important.

Hon. Maria Minna: And you've written a letter to the minister, I see.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Yes.

Hon. Maria Minna: You have not received a reply for clarification. Is that why this motion is here?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith: I would just say that because of the information I just gave you, and because of the fact that we can come with the listing of the projects, we will not be supporting this motion on this side of the House. It's untimely and the information out there is incomplete. I would suggest that we await a reply from the minister, because we've brought forward a lot of the information today.

So our side of the House will not be supporting the motion or the amendment.

The Chair: Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Mathysen, I just have a couple of questions.

The wording in the motion is “that the Government publish all outstanding research”. First of all, what is meant by the term “outstanding”? Presumably, any of the completed work is already published if it is indeed complete, i.e., including translation and so on. What we're talking about are projects that were undertaken by the policy research fund that are incomplete? Is that what we mean by “outstanding research projects”?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: My original conversation was with individuals and groups who had actually completed work. It needed to be translated and published, and they were told that would not happen. But Madam Demers has indicated that she would be in favour of including the work that was already in progress in that grouping, so that we'd have the benefit not just of the work that was ready for publication, but also of work that had already been undertaken and would also be valuable.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Okay, and that sort of tied into my question about publishing. Clearly, if it's a project that's not complete, you can't really publish an incomplete work, so it presumes that there would have to be some other continued work to complete these partially completed projects.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: It would have to allow the authors to finish their work, yes.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Have you looked into the cost or the volume of work that needs to be completed?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: That has been rather difficult to track down, and we need that information from the minister's office, of course. They would have a better sense of how much. But it would seem to me that since money has already been invested in this work, it only makes good sense to bring it to fruition.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Those are all the questions I have.

The Chair: Ms. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Thank you.

Mrs. Mathysen, I just wondered, in light of the fact that Mrs. Smith just gave us some numbers, three published and five online... Is that what we have?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: The total was eight, anyway.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Have you seen those? Are they some of the ones you're talking about? Do you know that?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: We've been in touch with the authors, who had indicated that their work was ready to be published and that they had received letters indicating it would not be, and we have had no indication from them that their work has gone ahead.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: So some of these in fact may be the eight that Mrs. Smith has been referring to, then.

So do you have a copy of that letter?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Yes.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: No, no, I don't mean the letter you wrote to the minister. I have that. I mean the letter that you said they received from the department saying that it wasn't going to be published, or wasn't going to be finished. Do you have a copy of that letter?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: The recipients have a copy of that letter, and we can certainly get that.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Okay, if you could give that to us, that would be great. Thanks.

The Chair: Madam Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: I think the most important thing here, Madam Chair, is whether or not the projects have been interrupted. If the projects have been underway for three years—some projects were underway for three years and were suddenly suspended last month or the month before—I think it is important to know how many there are, because a great deal of money has been invested in these projects. We are talking about money that could still be invested or about how much this might cost. However, if \$100,000 has already been invested in a project, if there is another \$25,000 to be invested to complete it, and if the project has something to do with the equality of women, I think that is something we should know. We must know which projects were funded by Status of Women Canada, which were independent projects, which were interrupted, which were completed but were not acted upon, and those that were not published. I think we need to know this, Madam Chair. We have been fighting for too long for the cause of women and we have been fighting for too long to get approval for projects relevant to this cause.

• (1715)

[*English*]

The Chair: Are you saying that we should amend the motion?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Yes.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen, are you in agreement with the changes proposed by Ms. Demers?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Yes, I think that it would be very helpful.

And just as a point of clarification in regard to Mr. Stanton's question, the money had been allocated, had been approved for these projects, and had been withdrawn. And that's the problem, that it was withdrawn.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I appreciate that, and with the greatest of respect, the difficulty with the motion is that it really isn't clear what we're talking about here. And Madam Demers' proposed amendment really tries to unearth that. It's very difficult to support a motion that is really so general that we're not too sure what we're voting for. So I share the view that I wouldn't support this.

I agree with Madam Smith that an answer seems reasonable in this case. A question has been put, and we should wait and see what the minister's response is, and perhaps we can go from there.

The Chair: Mr. Stanton raises a very valid point.

Madame Demers, would you have a proposed text for the amendment?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: I do not have one, Madam Chair. I have just seen the motion, and as usual, I think there is a problem with the translation. I do not think *projets en cours* means the same thing as "outstanding projects". On a number of points, the translation is not correct, is not literal.

[*English*]

The Chair: So basically you're.... Help me through it and say where you want the changes put in. Because I have another option, and I would like the committee to think about it. It is that we withdraw the motion at the moment and then come back with a well-worded motion that is in agreement with whatever we're trying to do. Withdraw it at the moment, and bring it back.

I'm going by what the clerk tells me, the terminology the clerk uses. That's the terminology I am using.

Is it an option to, in good faith, take it and look at it and come up with something concrete that says that this is the number of projects that are outstanding? Because the letter states here that these were at the final stages of completion, and that's Ms. Mathysen's major concern. So if these are at the final stage of completion, we could do some research to ask what projects these are, whether they are complete, and whether there is a list that says these are complete.

Can we come to an understanding and perhaps move forward that way? I think, then, we can all do business in an intelligent fashion.

Is it agreed? Ms. Mathysen, are you in agreement with doing that?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: That would be fine, as long as these projects do indeed see the light of day. That's all I'm concerned about.

The Chair: Can we have a commitment, Ms. Smith? So for the projects that we feel are in limbo somewhere, you could bring us what you have, and Ms. Mathysen will be able to check with the list, and then we can come up with something. Okay? Thank you.

Madame Demers, did you need to speak?

● (1720)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: I was just saying that you are very wise as usual.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, before everybody disappears, I've not adjourned the meeting yet.

Ms. Mathysen, are we waiting for the amended text to come when Ms. Smith presents the list of reports she has? Do you wish to send an amended text to the clerk, or do you wish to wait until next Tuesday to see what information we get? What would you like to do?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Well, obviously, time is of the essence. I will wait until next Tuesday, and we'll see what comes forward, and we will do our homework, as well.

The Chair: Fair enough, thank you very much.

This meeting is adjourned.

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