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Chair

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi

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•(1535)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.)): Committee members, we are ready to start our meeting. We are discussing the economic security of women and we have before us the following witnesses: from the Canadian Teachers' Federation, Noreen O'Haire, director, and John Staple, deputy secretary general; and from the Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario, Sheri Oliver, who is the director.

As you have been notified, there are 10 minutes of speaking. Are you going to be sharing your time? Yes? We are clock watchers, so we will watch the clock. It'll beep at you, and as long as you watch me signalling you, you will know that your time is up.

After you finish speaking, we will go to the round of questions, and after the questions, we will have you wrap up for a minute each.

There are votes today at 5:30, so the meeting will go on until 5 o'clock so we can discuss our committee business for 15 minutes.

Ms. O'Haire, are you going to start or do you want Sheri to start?

Ms. Oliver, for 10 minutes.

Ms. Sheri Oliver (Director, Strategic Nursing Initiatives, Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario): Certainly, thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chair, and good afternoon. My name is Sheri Oliver and I'm the director of Strategic Nursing Initiatives with the Registered Practical Nurses Association and we're known as RPNAO.

As I suspect many of you already know, the RPNAO is the voluntary professional association for registered practical nurses within the province of Ontario who are registered to practise in Ontario under the Nursing Act of 1991 and the Regulated Health Professions Act of the same year. The RPNAO is also a member organization of PN Canada, the national professional organization for practical nurses. We appreciate the opportunity to be here today.

I would like to brief you about one of Ontario's practical nurses and, in doing so, perhaps correct some of the misunderstandings that we characteristically encounter.

As I've indicated, registered practical nurses are regulated health care professionals and are known as RPNs in Ontario. In other jurisdictions you will know practical nurses as LPNs or licensed practical nurses. We constitute the second largest regulated health care profession. In Ontario both RNs and RPNs share the same

statutory scope of practice and study from the same body of knowledge.

While you will find both RNs and RPNs in all health care sectors, they differ primarily in the populations with which they practise. Those differences relate to the depth and breadth of education received, and I'll speak more to the availability of education in just a moment.

Since January 1, 2005, new graduates applying to register to practise as an RPN with the College of Nurses of Ontario must have a two-year diploma in nursing from a community college of applied arts and technology. Across Canada there are over 64,000 practical nurses, of which half, 29,000, are from Ontario.

Now, with that as background, I would like to recount some of the issues facing the profession that are relevant to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Ninety-four percent of RPNs are female. As such, we experience many of the challenges that face other female professionals in the workforce, and some are unique.

The majority of RPNs work shift work, weekends, and holidays. Having access to quality, affordable, and flexible child care is an issue consistently raised by our membership. For RPNs, having access to child care isn't a frill or a luxury; it is essential to allow them to practise and to contribute the human resources that our health care system desperately needs.

Financial security is also a major issue for many RPNs. Salaries for the RPN vary widely in Ontario. The best salaries for RPNs are available in hospitals, where a full-time RPN can earn between \$42,000 and \$47,000 annually, not much in today's economy, especially given the onerous responsibilities that nurses encounter on a daily basis.

Every day nurses face physically and emotionally taxing situations that are inherent to their chosen profession. For example, registered practical nurses working in the long-term care or community sectors have extremely large workloads, practise at high levels of autonomy, yet receive some of the lowest overall wages in provincial health care. But the RPNs who do have full-time employment, especially those who have full-time employment in hospitals, are relatively fortunate in our profession.

This statistic will surprise you, given all you've heard about a nursing shortage, but only 55% of RPNs in Ontario are able to find full-time work. There are about 2,000 in Ontario today, about 7% of the total profession, who are looking for full or part-time employment. Some are currently employed as unregulated health care providers or have jobs outside of health care. This is a chronic problem for our profession. I suspect you'll agree that it makes absolutely no sense during a so-called nursing shortage that much needed health care professionals are unable to find employment within the health care system.

I am sure you can also appreciate the systemic stressors that the lack of secure employment has on their own personal health, the well-being of their children, and attempts to balance personal and professional lifestyles as we encroach deeper into a sandwich generation. Our members describe the ability to find secure full-time work in their profession while controlling their overtime hours as their most important work life aspiration.

The Government of Ontario has put financial incentives in place to increase full-time employment opportunities for nurses, but the uptake of those initiatives by health care organizations has been greater for the registered nurse, and as a result, their full-time employment has improved at a much greater rate than that of the RPN. In fact, RPNs have seen little improvement in the availability of full-time employment.

• (1540)

Women, as a group, are less able or willing to accept a job or job advancement that will adversely affect their ability to care for their families. Accordingly, female professions must tolerate lower job security, limited career advancement opportunities, and less financial security.

You may ask yourselves how we find ourselves in this very peculiar situation of having a significant number of unemployed or under-employed RPNs in a time of a shortage of nurses. There are several factors at play.

One is a misunderstanding by hospitals and other health care delivery organizations about the competencies of RPNs. In Ontario, some hospitals have decided to implement an all-RN model, believing that this will result in higher-quality care. RPNs who were working in those hospitals were laid off or dismissed outright.

This all-RN model usually reflects studies done in the United States. I must point out, however, that licensed practical nurses in the United States are not educated to the same level as registered practical nurses in Ontario and do not have the same skill sets. Accordingly, those American studies do not reflect the knowledge, skill, and judgment that RPNs acquire.

We know that access to and availability of education has a positive impact on health care outcomes. However, for the practical nurse, educational opportunities related to collective agreements, child care opportunities, lack of employment recognition, and barriers in the educational system limit the impact these nurses can have and, in turn, are less able to manage educational opportunities available.

The second factor is that, for a number of historical reasons, RPNs are represented by multiple unions and are usually a very small component of those union memberships. It's completely under-

standable, therefore, that those unions rarely give RPNs' issues much priority. Registered nurses, on the other hand, have their own union that has focused exclusively on their issues.

The third factor is that RPNs are rarely found in management positions in health care organizations, most particularly hospitals. The heads of nursing are almost always registered nurses, and quite frankly and unfortunately, there's inevitably some intra-professional turf protection.

One final point I want to make, about which women in general encounter in the workplace, is one that is rarely discussed openly, and that is verbal abuse. Particularly in the high-pressure, high-stress environment of health care, verbal abuse directed at nurses and other female workers still frequently occurs. The ability to withstand verbal abuse is seen to be part of your job description as a nurse. Few nurses complain about or report verbal abuse, because doing so may be career limiting and because few health care organizations have effective reporting procedures or whistle-blowing protections in place. The same challenges exist in reporting verbal abuse to the professional regulatory bodies. So verbal abuse continues to be an unfortunate part of the job for nurses.

Madam Chair, I've almost exhausted my 10-minute allocation, so I shall stop now in order to leave as much time as possible for questions.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We shall now go to Mr. Staple or Ms. O' Haire.

Mr. Staple.

Mr. John Staple (Deputy Secretary General, Canadian Teachers' Federation): Thank you, Chair, and thank you very much to the committee for this opportunity to appear and speak to you about the teachers' concerns relative to the issues that affect the committee's work.

The Canadian Teachers' Federation is a national voice of teachers. We represent over 220,000 teachers in primary and secondary schools across Canada. We are a national bilingual umbrella organization and we're made up of 16 provincial and territorial member organizations and one affiliate member.

We believe we come from the premise, in dealing with issues of this nature, that strong social cohesion for all Canadians is an investment in the long-term prosperity of Canada. From that perspective, we believe that investing in children and in families is the most effective way to develop active and engaged citizens who will offer the most and contribute the most to the Canadian social and economic environment.

We've just held a national conference here in Ottawa over the past weekend on the whole issue of education for social justice, and many of the things we were talking about in that conference and dealing with are germane to the issues that are addressed by this committee.

Noreen was chair of that conference, so I will turn to her to continue on with the material and the issues we wish to raise.

• (1545)

Ms. Noreen O'Haire (Director, Professional and Developmental Services, Canadian Teachers' Federation): Thank you, John.

Thank you to the committee.

The conference was a rousing success. If we seem a little tired, it's because we were running hard for the last three days, getting that finished. Thank you, again.

I'm going to talk a little bit about the numbers of women in teaching, and then move from that into a more general look at women in terms of society in general, and then turn it back to John for some of our suggested remedies.

In 2003-04, 67% of full-time Canadian teachers were women and 78% of part-time Canadian teachers were women—Stats Canada figures, and they relate with ours as well. It's interesting to note that 57% of male teachers in the 2001 census reported earnings of \$50,000 or more compared with only 37% of female teachers at the same time, for the same education. In 2001, 26% of male teachers earned under \$40,000 compared to 26% of female teachers.

Lower average salaries of female teachers result in lower average pensions for female teachers, so that not only is there less buying power currently in their career, they are also saddled with this lower economic status for the rest of their life and their pensionable service.

It's interesting to note that women occupy only approximately 45% of school administrator positions in spite of the fact that they represent 67%. That fact alone is also one of the factors in why their salaries are lower, because of course, administrators receive an allocation, a bonus for being administrators.

That's changing gradually. In our elementary schools we're seeing more women become administrators. But it's still true that it's a male-dominated profession at the high school level.

The average earnings of employed women are still substantially lower than those of men, even when they're employed on a full-time basis. In 2003, women working full-time, full-year, had an average earning of \$35,000—71% of what their male counterparts made.

Women are more affected by chronic unemployment than men, particularly female lone parents. Lone women had the highest degree of volatility in earnings of any family type during the last two decades, as noted by Stats Canada.

Earnings over the past two decades have been stagnant for men, increasing in 2000 for the first time since 1980. The good news is that in contrast to that, earnings have increased steadily in each decade for women. So some of the work that committees like yours have done and the work of the teachers' and nurses' associations has begun to bear fruit. However, despite gains in earnings over the past two decades, women still earn less than men, not only in teaching but right across the board.

Women have made gains in employment because of increased hours and weeks of work, and notably because they have invested heavily in higher education, leading to better-paying occupations. Income of women in the early years of their careers, though, is affected by many factors—child care, access to unemployment,

provisions for top-up from such things as maternity leave, and of course, bearing the brunt of their children's educational costs.

Therefore, the cuts in programs like the status of women program and the literacy skills that have happened over the last little while have definitely reduced the probability of improvement of circumstances for women and other groups. As John mentioned earlier, we believe that programs focused on helping children will do much to help those women as well.

I'll turn it back over to John for some of our suggestions.

Mr. John Staple: As an organization, we have been long saying that early intervention and enhanced learning opportunities at early ages are keys to long-term prosperity and social cohesion for all Canadians. In that regard, programs and services that strengthen families are the targets we attempt to advocate for.

We think it's important to take a very, very close look at what we are doing in Canada with respect to child care. We would argue that the reinstatement of the funding agreements reached with the provinces and territories to establish 100,000 more child care spaces is a laudable goal. It should be a target for any government.

We have major concerns with respect to the funding of first nation child welfare agencies. We would recommend strongly that they be funded so they can deliver community-based in-home support and prevention services to their clientele.

We are now entering an era where greater numbers of immigrant and refugee children are entering our schools. The demographics of the country would lead us to conclude that this is not a short-term phenomenon but one that we will be facing for many years. Schools need assistance. Parents, teachers, and students need assistance, particularly in resources for English and French as second language school programs, but also including programs for teachers and parents that address cultural differences and language skills building.

We have long held that increased access to unemployment benefits for maternity, adoption, and parental benefits will have a significant impact on the economic security of women in their younger years. We would also like to see a greater degree of encouragement at the policy development level for the growth of top-up provisions in contracts of employment. When you lose that portion of income at the front end of a career, it impacts all those benefits that one would accrue along the way. That is why female teachers—even though the pay scales are the same as for male teachers—will have an average income that is below male teachers.

We are suggesting an increase in the drop-out provisions of the CPP/QPP for those who leave the labour force to raise children under the age of seven. We have reviewed recent studies that show that women still contribute much more time to household duties than men. In addition, they are more intensively engaged in elder care than are men. Sheri's comment about the sandwich generation was interesting. That's precisely where we are.

We believe that assistance for elder care is a significant component of the economic security for women, particularly in the 40- to 60-year age group. Increased access to family care leave benefits under the employment insurance program would help considerably in this regard, as would additional recognition for drop-out time under the CPP/QPP. If drop-out time is legitimate for addressing issues related to young children, it should be equally legitimate for addressing drop-out periods for elder care.

Senior widows outnumber senior widowers four to one. As measured by Stats Canada, many senior women slip into low income as a result of widowhood and stay there for a longer period of time than others. We believe changes can be made to the CPP to avoid that, or at least minimize it. One of them is that where a retired contributor to CPP/QPP dies and leaves a surviving spouse, the spouse should receive a survivor's benefit that is unaffected by any other benefit paid to the individual under CPP/QPP.

I will stop there, Chair, and look forward to questions or comments.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will start with the first round of questions.

Ms. Minna, for seven minutes.

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

Thank you for your presentation. All of you were very good.

It's not an easy area to solve, because it's very broad and many different pieces affect it. You have women's economic security, and I think we all agree with that, just from the three who have presented today.

I want to start off with Ms. Oliver, with respect to the RPN part-time work. One of the reasons that were given when the agreement with the provinces on our child care was dropped was that we needed a system that gave everybody choice, so that women who worked nights or days or shifts could then choose where they liked to put their money. This is why we have the \$1,200, which is taxable, as you know, and it doesn't create spaces at all. No spaces have been created since.

Can you tell me a little bit about the reality? You mentioned the dire need for child care, but can you address the part-time aspect of it specifically and what structure would help in that context, keeping in mind that when the national government funds child care, as we did under the agreement we had before with the provinces, we don't dictate how to deliver; it's more or less a broad objective.

• (1555)

Ms. Sheri Oliver: Not knowing much about how they're delivered through the continuum, nurses, particularly practical nurses, the greater majority of whom work casual or part-time, many times will get their shifts 24 hours in advance. You may not know from a tour of duty, which is about two weeks long from tour to tour, whether you're going to have work or not. Speaking from a personal perspective, you can't very well register your child in a full-time day care not knowing if you're going to have day care or if you're going to have shifts to pay for the day care.

Hon. Maria Minna: That's a fair comment. I needed to understand that.

Just to continue with the child care aspect. Mr. Staple or Ms. O'Haire, you both mentioned the reinstatement of the provincial-federal agreement that was in place before. I don't know if you're familiar with it, but I know that in Ontario they were calling it the Best Start program. A lot of it was being designed out of the schools; some of the schools are being retrofitted to provide early education in child care. One of the things that were important to me and to all my colleagues was that it's about early education. It's not just about looking after the child; it's also about development for the child.

Can you tell us if you would reinstate the agreement as it was or if you would make any changes? I obviously support the reinstatement of the agreement, but would you add anything else that wasn't there, in your view, in the previous agreement?

Mr. John Staple: Another 100,000 spaces.

Hon. Maria Minna: That's fair. Since we're a year or two behind, I would add a couple of hundred.

Mr. John Staple: I think that's it.

Let me speak from a personal perspective. I have a daughter who lives in St. John's, Newfoundland. The monthly money for child care to her is totally inadequate. Number one, she can't find a space anywhere that's worthwhile, and number two, if she did, the amount of money wouldn't come close to providing the kind of assistance she needs under her circumstances for the child care in question. I assisted both her and her partner with their taxes and I was absolutely shocked at the way the item is treated under tax. You can't even claim it from the highest income. To me, it's not answering the question, it's not answering the need.

First of all, we have to wrap our heads how many spaces we need and then the kinds of spaces we need. It's fine to have a space, but if nothing happens within that space, then—

Hon. Maria Minna: Go ahead.

Ms. Noreen O'Haire: Picking up on your question, in terms of the fact that it's not just child care, it optimally is early childhood development, which is so critical to success for children later on in their careers. If you examine the wages that are paid to these workers, you'll agree that you are not going to attract people with minimum wages who are capable of developing and delivering adequate early childhood development programs. I think parents are always looking for the very best care for their children. When you leave your child in someone else's hands, you hope for the best, and the wages being paid to many of the child care workers are just not adequate.

Hon. Maria Minna: Right, and upgrading the income was part of the component.

Ms. Sheri Oliver: I have to carry on with a point that John made in terms of the number of spaces that are available. There may be an adequate number of spaces for nurses. Health care is 24 hours. So if you're working part-time or casual and you get a call to go in to work, it might be a night shift and you don't have day care.

So there needs to be flexibility in terms of how these numbers are actually allocated.

Hon. Maria Minna: We have to be innovative, and that would be at the delivery end.

I still have a minute, so quickly, I'll go to Mr. Staple and Ms. O'Haire.

With respect to the teachers, you mentioned the differentiation in income of teachers, men versus women. That leads one to ask about the issue of pay equity or equal pay, which is a major—Now in Ontario and Quebec, pay equity exists. We, at the national level, still don't have legislation, but across the country, I imagine in other provinces, it's not there.

So there are the two issues: one is equal pay for work of equal value, and the other is equal pay for the same work done. And you're telling me that some teachers have lower incomes than men. So could you give us an idea of your position on pay equity, specifically? Then, of course, equal pay is another one. Why is that still a major issue across this country?

• (1600)

Mr. John Staple: Do you want to give the position on pay equity, and I'll talk about the salaries?

Ms. Noreen O'Haire: Well, teachers are paid the same. If you have the same level of education and the same level of experience, men and women are paid the same, so the actual salary is the same.

What we were talking about is average salary, because then you take into account the fact that women leave for childbearing. They don't get the increments when they should, and things of that nature. So it's equal pay for equal work, but the effect of some of the conditions that women obviously can't or don't—it makes a difference in the average salary.

The Chair: Did you want to respond, Mr. Staple?

Mr. John Staple: I'll give just a very short answer.

The salary scales for teachers are based on service and qualifications. So the difficulty that female teachers have is in catching up on the qualifications end. Being out of the workforce for periods of time does not enable them to undertake the same level of training as men are able to. Consequently, they are able to reach higher points on the salary grid than women do at much earlier phases of their lives. They may catch up, but overall, there's that pullback, and it affects overall pension and everything.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Madame Deschamps, for *sept minutes, s'il vous plaît*.

[Translation]

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

I would like to welcome our witnesses and thank them for appearing before the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

I listened to your presentations carefully, both that of the nurses and that of the teachers. I was very surprised to discover that among teachers, a vast majority of women are still disadvantaged compared to men in the year 2007.

I would like to ask you a question regarding the document you provided for our information.

Do you think that in order to ensure greater economic security for women, the government should give priority to policies on equity and equality, and that if the principles of justice and integration were included as part of the foundation of our society, it would be more democratic?

[English]

Mr. John Staple: I'm not sure how far you go. The teaching profession is one that has stood very solidly on the principle of equal pay for equal work. We have stood solidly on issues of equity in employment, at all levels, and still within our own profession and within our own organizations, when we combine the totality of the effect of a lifetime of work, we still have situations and circumstances in which the female component of our organization, which is the largest component, will still earn on average, over a lifetime, less than the male component.

The conditions that significantly affect that, we maintain, are child care and child raising and, on the other end, elder care.

• (1605)

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I would like to know whether the cutbacks at Status of Women Canada and the changes made in the Women's Program, for example, have been harmful to the equality of women. My question is to Ms. Oliver.

[English]

Mr. John Staple: I'll have Noreen speak to that.

Ms. Noreen O'Haire: I think in general the cuts to the status of women and literacy programs have affected women, not so much women who are teachers but women in general, women who perhaps lack the connections to be able to improve their lot, to improve their education.

I don't suspect that those cuts have really had a detrimental effect for women teachers, but certainly for the parents of the kids women teach and are concerned about, many of our people are really advocates. They are people who perhaps don't have some of the advantages teachers do have, and the teachers are really cognizant of the fact that this is an important part of the social fabric. It needs constant care and attention.

Mr. John Staple: Canada ranks 38th in the world in terms of the wage gap ratio between men and women. As long as that exists, then there is a very strong requirement for funding of those programs.

Ms. Sheri Oliver: Primarily for nurses, health care issues really are affected by child care and access and availability of education. In terms of any disparity between wages for male and female nurses, there really isn't that much work in terms of what disparity there is; however, we do know that 95% of nurses are greatly affected by access to education and to other opportunities, primarily child care.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I am from Quebec. I am sure you have heard about the child care system we developed there. When I was a trustee on a school board, we set up child care services in schools in order to provide teachers with easier access to the service and to help them continue working.

In Quebec, the child care system is designed not only to have children looked after by a caregiver, but also to provide a stimulating, responsible environment. It is possible to determine at an early age whether children need additional services. I do not know whether you have heard about the child care services in Quebec. Could this type of system apply throughout Canada?

[English]

Ms. Sheri Oliver: I actually have heard comments from different colleagues about the system in Quebec, and we've heard nothing but raves, positive things. I think certainly that it's an area that could be very well investigated, and principles of that could probably be adopted elsewhere.

Ms. Noreen O'Haire: We would echo that as well. When we did some research on this, the Quebec system was far superior.

I think it was one of the reasons the Canadian Council on Learning put their early childhood centre there. When they decided where to put it, it was founded in Quebec for that reason, because there were so many good programs that could then be rolled out across Canada.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Mr. Stanton and Ms. Smith, for seven minutes.

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

I'm going to defer to Monsieur Harvey to start. If he has some time left, I'll pick it up from there.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): I didn't think we would get to the questions so quickly.

Ms. O'Haire, you said earlier that the Women's Program may not have had a negative impact on your clients, but that it may have had a negative impact on parents.

As a result of the changes made at Status of Women Canada, the number of employees has been reduced from 131 to 71. This freed up \$5 million for investment in front-line services, that is services to parents and to women.

How can you say that this may have a negative impact on the parents of the children you teach? Did you understand my question correctly?

[English]

Ms. Noreen O'Haire: I was making the comparison that it wasn't a direct loss to women who are teachers. But we heard from many of our constituencies and many of our teachers that they've noticed the loss of programs in the communities in which they work.

I know there was a movement to transfer some of the money in more direct programs to child care work and other kinds of direct benefits. We spoke with a couple of people last week who talked about some of the programs that were done. Although those programs, the direct service programs, were greatly appreciated by the people in those communities, we find the network of support for people is still missing.

Sometimes when a program already existed, the money has made the program stronger. But in areas where no programs existed, the loss of the Status of Women organization meant a loss of the ability to write briefs, to investigate things, or to find some support networks. Those were the losses that are being reported to us.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Harvey: In any case, this additional \$5 million is reserved for women's programs. I fail to see how this could result in a reduction in services for Canadian women, whether they live in Ontario, Quebec or elsewhere.

I have another question. I am sure you have heard about the universal child benefit, where \$100 is paid to parents with children six and under in Canada. As the father of four children, I have paid particular attention to this issue, based on my personal experience. I realized that the \$205 million given to Quebec under the previous agreement amounted to approximately \$1,200 per child for 200,000 children. That means that the 200,000 children in Quebec's child care system were getting about \$1,200 a year. Since over 500,000 children are getting \$1,200 a year, that is \$100 a month, why do you think this is a step backward compared to the previous program?

In terms of child care costs, at the moment, there is 2.5 times more money available than under the previous program. We should not forget that mothers generally decide to stay home with their children from the time of their birth until they are one year old. Under the previous program, these mothers got no financial assistance at all, while under the current program, they get \$1,200 a year. So I do not see what basis you have for saying that this is a step backward compared to the previous program. Can you explain that to me?

• (1615)

[English]

Mr. John Staple: Let me offer a comment that reflects how I feel personally about it, and reflects the way I hope our organization looks at it and deals with it from a conceptual perspective.

I come from the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and I guess I'm a naturalized Canadian because I was born before Confederation. I remember the basis on which that Confederation deal was made. I remember a province whose families for many years eked out very sparse livings from the resources they had available. They came to rely on what they lovingly called "the baby bonus". It was a significant part of the family income, and I think that's abysmal. To me, the child credit is going back to those days.

My daughter is not one who earns a lot. What she needs is child care—a space and appropriate programs for child care. She does not need to rely upon additional income in the form of a baby bonus. That is the biggest conceptual social drawback to the program.

Ms. Sheri Oliver: A key thing you mentioned was women at home. Not very many women are at home. If you look around the table here, women are in the greater majority.

I feel compelled to tell you a personal story. A family member was called by the babysitter organization to pick up his child because he had chicken pox. The dad was penalized by his boss because his wife could have picked up the ball and taken care of the child.

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen is next for seven minutes.

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

And thank you for being here. Your information is truly very appreciated.

I want to start with Mr. Staple and Ms. O'Haire. It's interesting that we've heard about this \$5 million that's supposed to be floating out there and be accessible. I've been talking to various groups who are desperately trying to access it, and they can't find it. It doesn't seem to have any criteria attached to it. Even the bureaucrats have no idea about access or implementation. So I guess time will tell whether it actually materializes.

I was very interested in what was presented in the brief, "Investing in the Future". This is excellent. You cover a number of important topics. But I want to get back to Status of Women Canada.

It says here, "We believe that funding must continue to be available for advocacy and research specific to women's issues." That's a very forceful statement. Why is it so important that the research and the advocacy be there, particularly in regard to women's economic security?

Mr. John Staple: I think the facts speak fairly loudly about the circumstances surrounding issues related to economic security for women in this country. Admittedly we've come a long way, but there's much more to be done.

If you cut off the root and the ability of people to say what they think, to research what they believe to be the case, and to provide appropriate evidence on the issues they're attempting to address, then I think you're saying, we don't want to listen to the problems they have; we'll simply do what we want, but don't tell us anything new. That's the feeling I get. It's like I'm standing in front of a class of children trying to get them to think for themselves, but I don't want to hear what they're thinking. It's that kind of approach that we have considerable difficulty with.

• (1620)

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: It has been a while, but do you have any idea how much it costs for regulated, safe child care that does have the all-important educational component? I come from a teaching background, and I believe absolutely in early childhood development and the need for that. Have you any idea of how much it costs on a weekly basis?

Ms. Sheri Oliver: I haven't actually accessed child care for a few years now, but when I was, it was approximately \$300 a week, and that was with a subsidy.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: So \$100 a month is not going to cut it.

Ms. Sheri Oliver: No, ma'am.

Mr. John Staple: That doesn't even cover babysitting circumstances.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: And certainly babysitting, as valuable as it may be, does not have that important component that addresses the needs of a child when they're at that very important age, that zero to six. Thank you very much.

I wanted to ask Ms. Oliver—and by the way, happy National Nursing Week.

I was looking through some material, and it talks about the 300,000 hours of overtime every week that nurses put in and how that equates to 10,000 full-time positions, and yet across the country only 46.5% of nurses work in full-time positions. It seems to me that has a profound and negative impact on that balance that women are trying to achieve in terms of their family life and work. Because we're going to be making recommendations to the federal government, what do we need to do as a federal government to help nurses achieve a better balance, to get over what is very clearly a difficult kind of reality?

Ms. Sheri Oliver: I think it needs to be heavily ingrained into the culture of our health care system that there must be flexibility. I'm here today with you, a single mother of an 11-year-old boy. I need to be able to put my son into school, come here, and then go home. I still need to be able to find someone responsible enough to be able to look after him. I'm a lucky nurse. I don't have to work from 7:30 until 11:30, or from 11:30 until 7:30, and not have child care.

There needs to be flexibility within the system, whereby employers such as mine allow individuals to be able to find work-life balance.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

I was very interested in what you had to say about verbal abuse. It's very clear that there needs to be some work around harassment and abating that kind of abuse. I was curious about, first of all, the reticence of employers to even acknowledge it, and secondly, perhaps you could comment on the impact of this kind of violence in terms of the women working in nursing and how it relates to economic security.

Ms. Sheri Oliver: To the defence of employers within the health care system, I think honestly that they're stuck between a rock and hard place. If they address things, they're going to open up a can of worms and have a lot of problems that they may or may not have the tools to deal with.

As for what that does to nurses, it feeds into the current apathy. It addresses the hugely enormous problem of retention of nurses within the system, and in terms of recruitment.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: How am I doing, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have 40 seconds.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Oh dear.

I noticed, too, that there are 10,000 licensed practical nurses who are employed as casual employees. It would seem to me that casual is not a choice that most nurses would choose to make, because it's so unpredictable. Could you describe how casual employment compares to full-time employment? What difference does it make in the life of the working mom?

Ms. Sheri Oliver: From a personal perspective, it makes 120-degree difference. You actually are able to plan for your child's education. You're actually adequately able to plan for what you can do with your education if you have your sights set on something in terms of a five-year plan. I worked 10 years in a casual position. I wanted full-time, but it was not available. I was actually able to plan to go to school, to be able to do some of the things I wanted to be able to do. I was actually able to plan out some of those work-life balance issues that we all face everyday.

•(1625)

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

The Chair: Now we'll go to the second round.

Ms. Neville, five minutes.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Again, thank you to all of you for coming today.

Both of your organizations are representative, obviously, of workplaces with predominantly women. We're hearing about many of the challenges.

Ms. O'Haire and Mr. Staple, I was a little startled when I heard the figures you gave on the inequities in terms of the pay...because we know that men and women are paid the equal amount. But when I made the connection between leaving the workplace and educational opportunities, it certainly makes sense; there's a lack of it.

We're here right now looking at the whole issue of the economic security of women. Both organizations have made a number of recommendations that talk about social justice and inequities in society as a whole. I would be interested in knowing from all of you what specific recommendations you would make to us on public policy recommendations we could put forward to better redress the imbalance faced by women in your professions.

Obviously we're hearing that child care is front and centre, and a national child care program that's flexible and accessible and whatever. But do you have other suggestions that you would make in terms of redressing the imbalance in the economic opportunities for women?

Ms. Sheri Oliver: From a nursing perspective, in terms of the 95% women in that population, should there be equal access—and more access—to full-time employment, it would lessen some of the

systemic stressors that exist, such as child care, such as education, such as work-life balance.

Mr. John Staple: Some of these things I referenced earlier, I think. When we look at the time periods that have the biggest impact, they are the timeframes within which children are being raised. Then at the other end of the career, it's elder care.

The suggestions we are making with respect to employment insurance and changes to CPP would, we think, have a significant impact on moderating the economic effects of that. At the same time, I think what the EI program should do and what employment contracts should do is not penalize women for parenting, maternity, and adoption roles, for the periods of time when they're doing that. Neither should they penalize men who wish to take part in those same kinds of activities.

So the policies have to be geared to adjust to that in some fashion. Now, you can change the policies so that you can moderate the economic impact; what's more difficult is adjusting policies and opportunities to allow for the education opportunities that were lost as a result of the time. That's something we need to focus on as well.

The Chair: One minute, Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Ms. Mathysen raised the issue of the cancellation of the advocacy role in the Status of Women.

To both organizations, how do you see that cancellation affecting you? What impact will that have, either on you as organizations or on women generally?

Ms. Noreen O'Haire: In terms of women in general, those cuts removed the voices or eliminated the voices of some women. Immigrant women, women who are single parents, women who do not have huge educational opportunities already, women who have many stressors, battered women—all sorts of women look to Status of Women organizations for voices in doing these things. If you remove the infrastructure that helps those voices be heard, then you in a sense stifle those voices.

•(1630)

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to Mr. Chong for five minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank Madam Oliver for her testimony. It has been interesting and nuanced. But I want to actually address my comments to the Canadian Teachers' Federation.

You talk a great deal about equality, but there's one intellectually inconsistent element to your organization that I'd like you to address in a moment. A second problem that your organization, I think, needs to address, the intellectually inconsistent basis for your organization, is that one of your members is a Catholic Teachers' Federation.

We all know that in the province of Ontario the government funds Catholic schools. It's the only religious denomination funded in the province of Ontario, yet you say you support a strong public education system. That's intellectually inconsistent. It's inconsistent, *pointe finale*.

Ontario is the most diverse population in the country. Toronto is over 50% visible minorities. We have a situation where we're funding Catholic education—you're supporting that because one of your members is a Catholic organization—but we're excluding other Christian denominations, we're excluding parochial schools of the Muslim faith, of the Jewish faith. So it's interesting for you to appear in front of the committee and talk to us about equality, but that's a gross example of inequality, something that's been highlighted by the United Nations as well.

Either you truly believe in public education and you fund only a single public education system to the detriment of all religious denominations, or in a society that's becoming increasingly diverse, rapidly changing, you fund all parochial schools, whether they be of certain Christian faiths or Muslim faiths or other faiths.

That's one intellectual inconsistency that I think needs to be pointed out, because you do say you support public education, you do say you believe in equality.

The second thing I point out is my belief that society needs to encourage equality of the sexes. I think that's very important. I think it has been a key determinant of societies; an indicator of societies that are good is societies where women and men have achieved or are in the process of achieving equality. But I suggest that one of the big challenges facing your organization is a lack of diversity, a lack of minority representation amongst your members, and I'm interested to hear what initiatives you're undertaking—

The Chair: Order! Don't accuse the organization of discrimination or anything. They are here to come before us, and we need to respect them. So pose a question on what they have presented.

Hon. Michael Chong: I am posing a question. Madam Chair, with all due respect, I am posing a question.

The Chair: On economic security, Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: We're here to talk about equality—

The Chair: Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: —we're here to talk about the role of women, the role of minorities—

The Chair: As chair, I am going to rule you out of order if you badger the witness or accuse them of a failure—

Hon. Michael Chong: I'm not.

The Chair: Okay, so pose the question, please. You're finished with your time in a minute or so, so could you close the question?

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes. And I ask, Madam Chair, with the interruption, that my time be added to.

The Chair: We stopped the clock.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

There was a recent report in the media with respect to the Toronto District School Board, with respect to the role of minorities in the

education system. I think it's very important to hear from your organization what steps, what studies, are being undertaken to address this issue. If you look at the nursing profession, if you look at the medical profession, they're becoming increasingly diverse, and I think that's something that is to be commended. Many other professions are becoming increasingly diverse. Unfortunately, I think the teaching profession has lagged, especially in cities like Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area, where I'm from. Where you have a population that is undergoing rapid change, it's pretty important to make sure that the teaching profession is reflective of the student body it's teaching.

I'd be interested to hear what initiatives you might be undertaking or you have undertaken in this regard.

Those are my two points, Madam Chair.

● (1635)

The Chair: I would like to tell the witnesses that you're here for the economic security of women. If you feel that the question is out of order, that's your prerogative. If you wish to respond from the perspective of the economic security of women, do so.

Thank you.

Mr. John Staple: It's difficult to respond to the issue of the economic security of women within the framework of that question. However, let me just say that I've appeared before a number of committees and, with all due respect, sir, a question is a question, but an effort to discredit a witness is something entirely different. Unfortunately, that's how I felt.

We are defenders of public education. There are members of our organization who are publicly funded and whose thrust in terms of the students they serve is within a religious context in the Catholic schools in Ontario, but that does not diminish in any respect our support for public education or the fact that all our members, including that organization, are staunch defenders of public education.

We inherit from the provinces the structure for education that we work within. Until the citizens of those jurisdictions change those structures, we will continue to work within them.

Yes, we are very acutely aware that we need to do a lot of work with respect to diversity of the teaching profession. We've done studies to that effect. We've done studies analyzing the diversity of the student population and the diversity of the teaching population, and in all of the jurisdictions we have offered some suggestions as to how we go about addressing that.

It's a very difficult thing to do. It's something we need to work harder at. We need to work with universities and with governments to present and provide the kinds of opportunities that would see the extent of the diversity of the teaching population work its way into the school system in the fashion that we would like.

We are so concerned about it that two major national conferences in two subsequent years have focused on that whole issue of diversity and inclusion. We know there is a problem; we are certainly addressing it.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Madame DeBellefeuille.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much for your presentation, Ms. Oliver. I would just like to tell you that I am quite aware of how difficult your job is. I worked for three years in a public health centre for the elderly as a social worker, and I had to manage the recall list of registered practical nurses. I can tell you what a puzzle that was and I also know about the precarious working conditions facing registered practical nurses working in public institutions in Quebec. It appears that these conditions are similar in Ontario. You have my full respect, and I think you are right to be fighting for better working conditions from your provincial government, because your problems do come under provincial jurisdiction. You want to be able to offer better services to people in institutions and to those who need your health care services.

I can try to explain this whole debate here about child care services—which I find quite surprising. What we see today—and you have a concrete example of that—is a collision between two different approaches. With the money it is paying the children, which, in my opinion, is more like a family allowance, the government is definitely helping families make ends meet, but it is in no way ensuring the economic security of women.

I have three children and they went to a child care facility. When I started sending them there, I was paying \$200 a week, or 50% of what I was earning. When Quebec introduced \$5-a-day child care, my economic capacity as a woman improved considerably. Under the program, I then paid \$50 a week for my two children. So I had more money left to spend on their education, their clothing and their housing needs.

There is a certain lack of understanding between the government side and the parties on this side of the table. Day care centres in Quebec and elsewhere were established by women; not by the government, but rather by Quebec women who wanted to have access to the labour market to improve their economic security so that they would not have to depend on the father of their children in order to survive. That is a battle that women have waged, and I do not think that Mr. Harvey is aware of this fact.

Women established a network of child care centres, and the women working in them fought to improve their own wages, because they too were workers. We should emphasize that the Quebec child care network has not been in place that long as a public institution. We have a fine network that meets women's needs, allows them to improve their economic position and to join the labour market, and this is thanks in large part to the women of Quebec who fought to establish this network.

I worked in the area of health care in Quebec for 20 years, and when I hear people such as Mr. Harvey say that people should not feel negative impacts because of the reductions at Status of Women Canada, because the money has been invested in front-line services, I realize that for me, the expression "front-line services" means emergency food and other services, truly direct services. I think women need to learn to fight to express their rights, to speak out

against abuse and to believe in their importance in society. Unfortunately, they still need support in all these areas.

I have just one question for you, Ms. O'Haire and Ms. Oliver. You have an opportunity to speak to the five Conservative members of Parliament. Speaking as women, and not as practical nurses or teachers, what demands would you like to make to the federal government, which is suppose to be listening to you? What type of measures would really allow women to improve their economic security?

● (1640)

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame DeBellefeuille, your time is up. They have to answer the question quickly, then, in 35 seconds.

Ms. Sheri Oliver: I don't know if I'll be able to address it in 35 seconds, but I'll certainly try.

Thank you very much for those very kinds words. I do certainly agree that you have to be able to walk in those shoes to be able to understand perspective.

I'm trying to keep it in context of the nursing perspective while at the same time being a woman. Union issues primarily and education are really the two aspects that I can think of right now, and particularly I want to say that women can stand up. Women can do what needs to get done. We need the flexibility from employers to have the equal pay, the equal rights, the equal treatment for the equal work.

Ms. Noreen O'Haire: I can do it in five seconds.

The Chair: Sure, thanks.

Ms. Noreen O'Haire: What we want is the provision for adequately funded, universally accessible day care for all women and children.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to Ms. Mathysen for five minutes.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I feel compelled to apologize for what happened in committee today, and I want to thank you for your diplomacy and for your clarity.

I'd like to begin with Ms. Oliver, again. When you were presenting, you talked about the fact that the Government of Ontario provided certain incentives, and unfortunately there wasn't a great deal of uptake when it came to registered practical nurses, not as much as there was with RNs. I'm wondering about that. Why? What was that situation?

Ms. Sheri Oliver: It primarily extends to the lack of full-time employment that's available to the practical nurse in the province of Ontario.

What is it related to? It's related to perspective. You will see cyclical patterns where some employers, based on research from the United States, which I think I mentioned in my comments, believe that changing a model to a full RN model will impact positively on patient care, when in fact they're making decisions based on research that is not Canadian, that does not address a diverse population of nurses—I think, Mr. Chong, you addressed that—and they're not very well-founded decisions in terms of changing some of those complements of nursing skills mixes. What ends up is that employers are reticent to be able to put forth full-time employment.

To their defence, employers are grappling with how to be able to fit in providers with education, both RNs and RPNs, that is on a continuum. You have some education, professionals who have diploma-level education, some who have baccalaureate education. So to be able to define those into some kind of common ground must be very challenging for the employers.

●(1645)

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

One of the other areas of profound concern to me is the lack of a national housing program. I wonder if you've done any research on, given any consideration, to how important it is, in terms of women's economic security, to have an affordable, secure home. This is the kind of national housing policy that we once had in this country and that is definitely missing, particularly as it pertains to the lone, single mom trying to raise a family and the reality of ever-increasing costs in regard to providing that home.

Ms. Sheri Oliver: Those things are really systemic. They impact not only on the everyday things like economic security, but on our emotional health, our physical health, and that translates to our family members, not just our children, but our entire family members.

Women will grapple with decisions, especially as single moms, between working and perhaps putting your child into a day care or with a babysitter you may or may not trust, but you know that you have to go to work. You have to make difficult decisions on whether you pay rent or pay child care. Those are some very difficult decisions when we talk about homelessness.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Do you have anything to add?

Mr. John Staple: We have a liaison in the form of loose coalitions and national organizations that are involved in housing issues. We are this year finding more and more about it and how it impacts on the other relevant issues of economic security that we've been observing. We find it particularly difficult to address in northern regions of Canada, so we've been focusing on that concern.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Yes, we actually had some representatives from Inuit communities here last week, and they talked about the fact that people are provided with these little square boxes that are not habitable; they're sealed boxes. So children and families are in these sealed environments with no fresh air, and there's overcrowding to the point where sometimes 18 or 19 family members are living in these little sealed boxes.

So we have much to do in that regard.

Ms. Noreen O'Haire: Some of the work that John mentioned in terms of the Campaign 2000, if you listen to them, or Make Poverty History—our work with them gives us some peace there.

One interesting thing happened at our conference last Sunday. Our closing speaker was Tom Jackson, and he told us some stories and sang some songs for us. The night before, speaking with him, we learned that he's involved, as are other people, in affordable housing for aboriginal and Inuit people, so he told some very poignant stories. He's a fascinating humanitarian who has done so much good work in food banks before, and now is moving into housing.

So connecting with people like him is always inspiring. I think we can do more by highlighting that kind of good work.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for coming and sharing your insights with us this afternoon.

This is to Noreen and John, first of all, on the question of the child care benefit. In the course of your discussion, you talked about even upwards of 200,000 day care spaces being advisable. You talked in terms of your displeasure with the \$1,200 per year. I assumed from this—maybe you didn't say it outright, and correct me if I'm wrong—that you would consider that the public sector should in fact be paying more fully the cost of someone attending a day care centre, vis-à-vis the Quebec example, where day care is fully subsidized. So I drew that conclusion from your comments.

In terms of moving to that, in budget 2007 the government embarked on a program to bring fiscal balance to the provinces. This involved some \$35 billion in transfers to the provinces for services that are within the provinces' control. Would you be aware that the provinces can in fact bring those kinds of services if they wish? This is child care services and the day care realm, albeit the government has played a role. Would you realize that in fact provincial governments can do this if they wish, as Quebec has?

●(1650)

Ms. Noreen O'Haire: I think we're more concerned with having the service for women and children, not with getting involved in a debate as to whether it's a provincial or federal responsibility.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: That's a good point. Okay. Thank you for that.

Sheri, I was quite intrigued by your discussion about particularly the issue of verbal abuse in hospitals. I assume that it's in the hospital setting. You say health care settings, but let's say for now that it's hospitals.

Ms. Sheri Oliver: It could be all of them, yes.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: One of the lines in your text—which you didn't read out, and it made me wonder why—is: “The medical profession with whom we work most closely is still dominated by males”. Is there any reason why you didn't want to put that in the context?

Ms. Sheri Oliver: Do you know why? It's because verbal abuse doesn't necessarily just come from the male population, and it doesn't come just from nursing staff to nurses. We're all in this together. Therefore, I didn't feel the need to point fingers.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Following up on that, I wonder if you feel that the professional associations—for example, the Ontario Medical Association—including nursing, are addressing this topic adequately. Is there a level of awareness that's helping to push this issue forward? Because it's real. And if in fact there isn't an environment that would allow those issues to be dealt with properly in the workplace, there should be.

Ms. Sheri Oliver: I fully agreed. It is an issue that all the associations—OMA, RNAO, RPNAO—are definitely aware of, and discussions are happening. As for the best strategies to address it, I don't think we're there yet.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Okay. That's all I have, Madam Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: We have a minute.

Would you like to pose a question, Ms. Smith?

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Yes.

I'd like to thank each and every one of you for coming today with all your insightful information. It's very much appreciated.

I had one question for John and Noreen, having been a teacher for 22 years, about your comment about men and women in the teaching force. What would you say are some of the things that can help women in terms of making sure that the benefits for their pensions are not interrupted? I understood that this was a provincial jurisdiction. I was a teacher negotiator, and we used to negotiate this within our contracts.

So how does that apply to the federal level? Could you explain that?

Mr. John Staple: I guess the determination as to how it would apply at the federal level would be your call.

Yes, the teachers' pensions are a provincial jurisdiction, and there are provisions within contracts and provisions within those pension plans to allow for periods of time when individuals have been out for child rearing, to add those periods of time to their pension plans so they don't lose the years of service.

Where they lose is in reaching that point of annual salary that is the same as the men's. They don't get to that level. Whether that's a feature or a structure of the kinds of standards for pension legislation that are applicable at the provincial level or at the federal level is something for debate, because I think federal pension standards, federal labour standards, federal standards for everything, find their way down to the provincial level. So I think one is not impacted without the other.

Do you know what I'm saying? I think that one would have a significant impact on the other.

•(1655)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Pearson has the last question for four minutes.

Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Let me just be clear at the beginning that we wrestle here in this committee with the issue of economic security for women. It's meant a lot to us that you've come here today. We greatly respect the people who do come here and inform us, and their professionalism, because we can't be everywhere.

I feel a little embarrassed too about what's happened today, but I appreciate very much that you have come and the position—

Hon. Michael Chong: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

I'm a member of Parliament. I'm a member of this committee, and I have the right to express my viewpoints on these issues. The witness who came in front of committee started to ridicule some of our government's priorities, so I thought I'd point out some of the inconsistencies in their arguments. And I don't appreciate it when people denigrate my right to make representations in front of this committee.

The Chair: And they have a right to apologize on their behalf too.

An hon. member: It goes both ways.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Pearson.

Mr. Glen Pearson: My question is actually for Ms. Oliver.

I know you said that 94% of the nurses are female. I notice also that you've talked about how in the rural regions there are some special challenges. I've just come from being in the hospital for the last five days with somebody who hit a moose, in a northern part of the province, and I've seen what those nurses have had to go through, and the difficulties. I wonder if you wouldn't mind expanding a bit—because we've heard a lot here—about rural poverty for women. I wonder if you wouldn't mind addressing that for me.

Ms. Sheri Oliver: It's hard for me to address from a personal perspective, or even from a professional perspective, some of the rural aspects, because I don't really live in a rural area. I live in an urban area, and I don't understand completely all of those particular things that really impact on them, except for those that our members tell us about.

What we hear from them is that being able to get to work is a challenge. It might be an hour-long commute, and I'm sure we all face perhaps a 45-minute or hour-long commute to work. There's along back roads, among moose, and they're facing great challenges every day to go to work, not just in their workplace but in getting to work. They face fear in trying to drop off their children and then get to work, never knowing if they're going to encounter wildlife on the way.

I'm not sure if that actually addresses your question, but certainly it's an area that needs to be looked at for some of the other lesser-populated areas.

Mr. Glen Pearson: Thank you.

The Chair: That's it?

Can I give your one minute to Madam Deschamps?

Mr. Glen Pearson: Certainly.

The Chair: You have one minute.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: This is not a question, but a comment. I'm feeling somewhat uncomfortable here. During this session, the Standing Committee on the Status of Women took on the task of studying the economic security of women. All the witnesses we invited and welcomed put forward important concerns.

In my view, the concerns you put forward today were in the same vein. That was the purpose of this meeting. Unlike Mr. Chong, I perceived nothing ridiculous in what you said. I would like to express the respect I have for the work you do. We know that it includes a great deal of volunteering. So I wanted to thank you on my own behalf and on behalf of my colleague.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: My comments were relevant. Women are disadvantaged in our society—there's no doubt about it—and the most disadvantaged women in our society are women from visible minority groups, immigrant women. So when I ask questions about diversity, about visible minorities, and about what we are doing to promote them in the teaching profession, that has a high degree of relevance.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'd like to thank you all for being here, and I'll give you a minute to wrap up. You have given us a very informative session. It was, as you can see, very lively here.

We are tackling the economic security of women, and we will be looking at some of the recommendations that you've made in terms of early childhood strategies or in terms of CPP, etc., as we prepare the report as well.

I thank you for taking the time out to be here. You've been witnesses before, so you know, in Parliament, what happens here.

With that, I'd like to give you each a minute to wrap up.

● (1700)

Ms. Noreen O'Haire: Thank you.

I agree with you, Mr. Chong. You're exactly right that the diversity of the teaching force is very important, and it's very important to us too, so I appreciated that part of your comment.

I'd like to, though, mention that what provinces decide is public education is the provincial mandate. Alberta has the same kind of thing, so it's a provincial kind of thing.

I'd like to again thank everyone for the opportunity to bring to your attention the welfare of women in general and the welfare of women teachers in particular. I think that equity is a supremely important concept for all of us, and the voice of women needs to be heard, and needs to be magnified, if we're to have true equity.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Staple.

Mr. John Staple: When we appear before committees, it's never our intent at the outset to say or do anything that appears to cast ridicule on anybody's position. You have to understand that we provide our opinions when we're invited to appear before a committee. We may differ in our views and opinions, but that's okay. That's what democracy is all about.

Thanks.

The Chair: Ms. Oliver.

Ms. Sheri Oliver: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to say thank you again to everyone. It's been an extreme pleasure to participate in the process today.

RPNAO believes strongly in collaborative relationships. As we go into the future, that must be embedded within the framework of any approach, working together, in addition to education, access to affordable and flexible child care, and enabling individuals to participate.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'd like to suspend the meeting for a few minutes.

- _____ (Pause) _____
-
- (1705)

The Chair: I call the meeting to order.

There are two or three items that we need to go through. The first is a motion from Madame Demers.

I understand, Madame Deschamps, you're going to be reading that motion for the record.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Madam Chair, Ms. Demers and myself agreed that I would move this motion in her absence. The motion reads as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on the Status of Women ask the Minister of Status of Women to provide by Wednesday May 30th, 2007, a list of all organizations that applied for grants under the Women's Program, and to identify which grant applications were approved and which were turned down.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mrs. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith: The minister will be very happy to provide this information. Due to the Privacy Act, she first has to ask the organizations if it's okay to do that. So it'll be forthcoming after that.

The Chair: Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: I have a clarification, which I should have mentioned earlier.

Where it says "asks the Minister of Status of Women to provide", I assume that means provide to committee members.

The Chair: Yes.

Hon. Anita Neville: Okay, that's fine.

The Chair: Can we make that change, Madam Deschamps?

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Yes, absolutely.

[English]

The Chair: We'll add "to committee members".

Ms. Neville moves it.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Madame Deschamps, are you satisfied with Ms. Smith's response?

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Perfect.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith: I just want to add that she's going to try by May 30, but she needs to get permission from the organization, so it might take a little longer than that. But she'll do it as quickly as she can.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Deschamps.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: We are taking the information provided by Ms. Smith into account. In any case, we do specify a date in the motion. What we would of course like is to obtain the requested list by that date.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Smith, would you ensure that the list goes up to that date and that this isn't prolonged too long afterwards?

Mrs. Joy Smith: Of course. The minister wants to do it as quickly as she can.

The Chair: Are we all agreeable to this, then?

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: The second motion is by Ms. Minna.

Ms. Minna, would you like to read your motion for the record, please?

Hon. Maria Minna: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I move, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), that the Standing Committee on the Status of Women recommend to the government to immediately introduce proactive pay equity legislation as recommended by the 2004 federal Pay Equity Task Force, and that the chair report the adoption of this motion to the House without delay.

• (1710)

The Chair: Is there discussion?

Ms. Smith, and then Mr. Stanton.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Our government recognizes pay equity as a human right, and a very important human right. The pay equity provisions have been in the Canadian Human Rights Act since 1977. The equal wage guidelines were actually enacted under the Conservative government in 1986, and this government remains a strong supporter of pay equity. Under the previous Liberal government, funding cuts to the

labour program in the early 1990s resulted in almost a decade without any pay equity programs

I must say the minister did look at the pay equity legislation, and we will not be supporting this motion, because he has already taken action to ensure that supervisors are in place, and there is very strong support for pay equity without the legislation actually having to be changed, and all the timelines and everything. Without its being held up, he's just getting the job done now.

The Chair: Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Continuing that line of thought, this is a topic we have discussed before at this committee. As Madam Smith has indicated, the current minister has suggested that in fact new legislation...new, as in this motion, suggests proactive pay equity legislation. We have pay equity legislation now; it exists. It really just needs to be implemented. To properly implement it, the minister has embarked on a proactive program to hire some 100 to 110 new inspectors, to have them on the job site making sure that the existing pay equity legislation, which is proactive and far-reaching, is properly implemented.

The second point, Madam Chair, is that the government response, I believe, and I could be corrected on this, to the fifth report of this committee—a response, in fact, by the former government—clearly outlined those same points, in 2005. I think if we were to check back to see what that government response says, it would echo these sentiments exactly.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stanton.

Madame Deschamps.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I support that idea. Last week again, we met with a number of groups who had come to make representations to members of the House of Commons. Those groups include the unions and associations who defend women's rights. They told us that, in their opinion, the bill had many gaps in its current form. It is quite difficult for complainants to get a decision within a relatively short period of time. We were also reminded that three or four cases were currently before the courts, and had been before the courts for some 20 years.

In Quebec, we currently have the Employment Equity Act. Since that legislation was enacted, nobody has gone bankrupt and no company has closed its doors. On the contrary, employers are very comfortable with the legislation. I think a model along the same lines should be applied to all of Canada, to deal with the current problems and provide some protection for workers.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Members of the committee may remember that the Standing Committee on the Status of Women examined the pay equity task force report and recommended, at one time, that the recommendations be implemented.

If, Madam Chair, the researchers would like to go through and find it, they will discover that in fact the ministers of the day, Joe Fontana, Minister of Labour, and Irwin Cotler, Minister of Justice, committed to bringing in draft legislation to implement the pay equity as recommended by the task force. I can't recall whether their commitment was to bring the legislation to this committee or not, but there was a commitment to draft the legislation and precipitate a discussion on it so that it, as an issue, could move forward.

I will be supporting this recommendation.

• (1715)

The Chair: Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I understand some of the statements that are being made, but two wrongs don't make a right. The reality is that the Human Rights Commission, which has been dealing with all of these appeals, in fact stated that the legislation is ineffective because they haven't been able to deal with it. Women at Bell have now been fighting for 25 years, practically; the post office for as long. I know you say that there are others, more staff. It's still complaint based. It will take forever to do. The Human Rights Commission itself has said that.

While I understand that people talk about the cuts of the early 1990s, we can go on that little record for a long, long time. The reality is that we had found a \$42 billion deficit. The cuts were made, but things were changed. On top of that, the former Prime Minister made a commitment to introduce legislation in the fall of 2005. Well, in the fall of 2005 we unfortunately went into an election.

That doesn't change the fact that two ministers and the former Prime Minister made that commitment. It doesn't change the fact that the current legislation, which is complaint based, is ineffective. It doesn't change the fact that the Human Rights Commission has said it doesn't work because they can't work with it. And it doesn't change the fact that two provinces have proactive legislation where in fact it is working, whereas the rest of the country doesn't.

Quite frankly, I think it's time to move on. Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen, then Ms. Smith, and Mr. Stanton, very briefly.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: I'll be very quick. There's another issue I need to bring up to the committee.

I will support this motion because, very clearly, we have a report from the 2004 committee and it provides the step-by-step means of achieving this. Very clearly, complaints-based legislation isn't working. After years of litigation, individuals are still not able to exercise their rights, because they can't afford to.

So we need to move on this.

The Chair: Ms. Smith, very briefly.

Mrs. Joy Smith: It's a very big issue, because members on this side of the House take pay equity very seriously. I don't want to throw stones, but the previous government had 13 years to do this and it wasn't done. We did study it. We did study it here in the Status of Women. We all agreed this was very important. We put the report in the House, and if you look at the reply when we tabled the report in the House, it did not make a strong commitment at all.

I would say that this report was done, and this is what we looked at. When we went into government, we found out that we already had a lot of the things that we needed in place, but the actual implementation was not there. Our minister got busy, and he implemented—We had dead legislation in the House of Commons, where no implementation program was put into place.

Having said that, I applaud some of the initiatives of our Quebec members. When they talk about what they've had, I would like very much to take a look at what they've had.

We will have to vote against this motion, because we have the pay equity up and running and we have the implementation program on the books right now. The minister is very set on making sure that women in the workplace are treated in a very fair and equitable way.

This motion is redundant. We've already had this motion, we've already had the report, we've already tabled the pay equity report in the House of Commons, and right now, with the pay equity initiative implementation plan that's in place right now, we need to see the improvements that are being made. If we go into something like this, it will take absolutely months and perhaps years to get new legislation, whereas now we're acting on what we have.

I would think that we need to table this motion and have more discussion on this so we know what we're doing, rather than going headlong into something that is going to hold up the pay equity, which is extremely important.

The Chair: Mr. Stanton, do you have something to add to what Ms. Smith said?

Mr. Bruce Stanton: I was going to say, Madam Chair, that this is a topic that deserves a robust discussion. I see the bells are ringing. You may want to consider finishing up with this and perhaps carrying this over to the next meeting. We'd be happy to do that.

Through the course of this discussion we've had, even with the economic security, we've seen a host of evidence that the wage gap is closing. We're up to the situation where we have some 86%—I, for one, would certainly like to go back and look at that government response—both of them in fact. We had a government response in 2005 and another one this year on those reports.

I don't know if the mover would consider that. Honestly, this is something that deserves more discussion.

I can keep talking—

• (1720)

The Chair: I'm going to ask Ms. Minna if she is willing to consider that or if she wants to call the question.

Hon. Maria Minna: I want to say, Madam Chair, that regardless of the responses of the previous government, as far as I'm concerned they don't change anything, because things change. What I'm saying is that if it was wrong before, it's right to do this now. Two wrongs don't make a right.

I would like to call the question and get on with it.

The Chair: I am calling the question.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: I had the floor. I can keep talking until the end of the meeting, which would have been my right.

Hon. Maria Minna: Do you want to leave it to the next meeting? Is that what you want, or do you want to just kill it?

The Chair: He's suggesting the next meeting

Hon. Maria Minna: When will we deal with it—at the beginning of the next meeting?

Mr. Bruce Stanton: If you want to do it at the beginning, that's fine.

The Chair: Fair enough.

Is it agreed that we defer this to the beginning of the next meeting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Fine.

I have one very quick thing that Ms. Mathysen would like to bring it up. It will take a minute or so.

Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: I went to Pauktuutit, because I'm very concerned about the testimony we heard in regard to the crisis in Inuit communities. We received the invitation last week. It seems to me that it would be very beneficial if the committee could go north to see what is happening there first-hand.

If we could travel, I'm wondering what the process is for accomplishing that.

The Chair: I discussed that with the clerk. Basically, an invitation should come from the group to the committee chair. Once it comes, the committee discusses its priority and the merits of it. We'll do due diligence on whether we need to go there. Once the committee approves it, we put it to the Liaison Committee for approval of the budget, and then it moves forward.

I checked with the Clerk of the House as well. If you have received a personal invitation, for example, then you can go personally and you do not represent the committee. If you want to go anywhere personally, you can go at your own expense, but never invoke the name of the committee.

Does that answer your question?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Yes. That's good.

The Chair: Thank you.

Yes, Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith: There is something I'd like to put on for the next meeting. The bells are ringing, so I didn't bring it up. The people from up north had asked about it and I was going to bring that to the chair next meeting, so could we put that on the agenda for the next meeting as well?

The Chair: Sure.

Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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