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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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•(1105)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), study on Government funding cuts to the Human Resources and Social Development Canada Department. That will be our agenda for today.

First of all, I'd like to welcome the members of the committee. I will be replacing the Chair for some time. I'd also like to take the time to welcome each person that has been invited to speak today.

Members of the committee have received briefing notes, and I'd like to mention that although the witnesses that are appearing before us today were selected beforehand, certain last minute changes have been made.

And so, some of the briefing notes aren't necessarily based on what we will be hearing today. You may consult them, but in certain cases they may not correspond to this morning's presentations.

[*English*]

Before us this morning we have five different groups of witnesses: the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, the Canadian Policy Research Networks, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, and the Muttart Foundation.

[*Translation*]

Each group has seven minutes. I would now invite the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations to make its presentation.

Mr. Phillippe Ouellette (National Director, Canadian Alliance of Student Associations): First, I wish to thank you for having invited the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations. Our Alliance represents nearly 300,000 Canadian students of postsecondary school level.

[*English*]

A few weeks ago the government announced that it had secured \$1 billion in budget savings over the next two years. The students we represent were shocked to hear that much of those savings were being cut from education and youth programs. Over the next two years we will see \$17.1 million cut from literacy programs and \$55.4 million from investment in youth employment.

Our members and the students of Canada have several concerns about the announced cuts. So CASA would like to discuss how Canada's post-secondary students will be affected. My colleague,

Toby White, will run through our major concerns related to the recent announced cuts.

Mr. Toby White (Government Relations Officer, Canadian Alliance of Student Associations): Our members believe that education is the key to a healthy, prosperous society. We believe that post-secondary education is the path that will allow all Canadians to reach their full potential. But before many Canadians can even dream of going on to college or university or of studying a skilled trade, they must improve their basic education. Literacy is the key to academic achievement; youth with low literacy scores are unlikely to go on to post-secondary education. Low levels of literacy are one of the main reasons we see such a disappointing participation rate by aboriginal youth in our universities.

This issue does not just concern youth, however. Students continually hear governments across Canada talk about the importance of lifelong learning. Yet this remains largely lip service; governments remain extremely biased towards traditional students who graduate from high school, go on to college or university, and then enter the workforce.

Canada needs a real strategy on lifelong learning. To our members, post-secondary education means not just traditional college and university, but also a true culture of learning that helps all Canadians realize their potential. We should not abandon adults with low levels of literacy. Not only can adult learners complete high school education, but they can also improve their education and advance their careers throughout their lives. We must focus on a high-quality post-secondary system, but we must also focus on the basics, such as literacy. It is for this reason that our members are deeply concerned about the announced cuts to adult learning and literacy programs.

The cuts that affect Canada's students most directly are the \$55 million from youth employment initiatives. It seems the cuts will mainly be from the summer career placement program, with this program's budget being cut in half. The SCP program provides employers in communities across Canada with funding to hire students for the summer. These jobs provide students with career-related work experience, mostly in non-profit organizations. The program is extremely successful, with over 50,000 students being hired every summer. Research has shown that both students and employers find their experiences with the program valuable: 91% of students enjoy the jobs they get and 95% of employers are pleased with the performance of the program. It's difficult to think of another government program with a success rating like this.

The program is an engine of job creation. The large majority of employers could not have hired a student without the program's funding, and many more could not have paid the student the same amount of money.

The benefits of this program for Canada's students are significant. First of all, students receive not just a summer job but also a quality summer job, giving them their first career-related work experience. Secondly, the income students receive from summer jobs is vital in order for them to pursue their studies. The benefits of earning a decent wage while also working at a job that provides career experience cannot be exaggerated.

Employers benefit by getting energetic young employees who are committed to learning and developing new skills. Thanks to the funding provided by the government, employers get a summer worker who they would otherwise not have been able to afford.

Canadian communities benefit in many ways as well. Employment increases, which is especially important for rural communities, where students may otherwise have had to look for work in cities. Much of this funding goes to community-based non-profit groups. The jobs created by SCP can help to improve programs in the community. I personally benefited from the SCP program after my second year of university. I was hired by a community group in rural Alberta. My job involved running a youth employment centre that helped other rural youth find jobs and start their own businesses. This was an incredible experience for me, but also a tremendous benefit to the community as a whole.

Implementing these proposed cuts will be detrimental to Canadian students and communities. The cuts are being done in the name of value for money. With the program having such a high success rate, it's difficult to see how the program is not currently delivering value for money.

Some in the government have made arguments that funding should be diverted away from federal ridings with high employment, and from private corporations, towards areas of higher need. Now, there's a legitimate argument for making the SCP program more targeted. Certain areas of the country may have a greater need than others for funding to increase student summer employment. Funding could also be better focused on improving opportunities for groups such as aboriginal students. Improved targeting of funding does not necessitate a cut in funding; in fact, better targeting of the existing funding would produce better results.

I'll now pass the floor over to Mr. Ouellette, who will leave you with some finishing remarks.

• (1110)

Mr. Phillippe Ouellette: CASA strongly disagrees that the current student career placement program does not deliver value for money. While some funding does go towards private businesses, it generally creates jobs that otherwise would not have existed. The program is beneficial, even in prosperous areas such as Calgary, to use an example that the minister brought up in the House.

Non-profit organizations must compete for workers and pay competitive wages on restricted budgets. The program helps these groups hire summer students that they otherwise could not hire. Even in Calgary, it can be difficult for students to find summer employment, especially jobs that provide them with valuable career skills.

If the government goes ahead with these cuts, there will be several consequences. It will surely mean fewer jobs for students. Even with a more targeted approach, cutting the funding in half will mean half as many jobs. This will mean higher unemployment for students who will have a harder time financing their education. More importantly, these students will be missing out on valuable career experience. They will have a disadvantage in starting their careers. Non-profit groups in the communities they serve will suffer. An extra employee for the summer can make a world of difference to community groups. This is important for groups from Toronto to Labrador.

These cuts to human resources and social development come along with the cutting of the youth international internship program and proposed cuts to the Fulbright and Commonwealth scholarships. CASA is deeply concerned that the government is cutting programs that provide Canadian youth with valuable career experience. We would expect the government to place value on employability and career skills, and we hope the government reconsiders these cuts.

Thank you very much for your time.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours): Thank you, Mr. Ouellette.

[English]

Now, I will ask the Canadian Policy Research Networks to give their presentation.

You have a maximum of seven minutes, please.

Mr. Arthur Kroeger (Chairman, Board of Directors, Canadian Policy Research Networks): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My name is Arthur Kroeger. I'm the chairman of the board of CPRN, and I have been the chairman for the past seven years. I was associated with CPRN when it was first created by Judith Maxwell twelve years ago, and I have been on the board throughout. I have watched it evolve from a bit of a shoestring operation into what I think can fairly be described as the major social policy research organization in Canada.

The coming into existence of CPRN met an important need. Organizations such as the C.D. Howe Institute, the Fraser Institute, and now Mr. Manning's foundation find it fairly easy to raise a lot of money from the private sector. It's quite different in the area of social policy research: business says it is the government's job. Indeed, governments have supported us throughout, and they have been an important base upon which we've conducted our operations. As you know, the announcement ended government funding effective from the current year, and we will be on our own as of next April 1. We're currently evaluating how we might function.

With respect to the history of CPRN, from small beginnings we have had two evaluations. Both of them covered a wide range of people—supporters, provincial governments—across the country. They were very positive about the quality of our work, and they vote with their feet. We get 1.6 million downloads at our website every year. I would compare that with 900,000 for the Institute for Research on Public Policy and about 430,000 for the C.D. Howe Institute. We do have users, and we have been filling a purpose.

We have prided ourselves on providing neutral space for dialogue. We are not ideological. We are not the Centre for Policy Alternatives, on the left, nor are we the Fraser Institute, on the right. We try to conduct very objective research about matters, such as policies that are best for children. We think our work has been well received.

We are assessing our future now. If, in the worst case, CPRN was to disappear, it would leave a very important void in the area of social policy, and it would leave most of the research output to the organizations, such as the C.D. Howe and Fraser Institutes and Mr. Manning's institute. That is the issue before us.

I'd like to ask our president now to elaborate on the current situation.

Ms. Sharon Manson Singer (President, Canadian Policy Research Networks): Thank you very much.

Thank you to the committee for inviting us here today. We're delighted to return.

As you know, when you first met, we were one of the very first groups you called upon for advice in your deliberations, because of course of the quality of our research and its stellar contribution to thinking in Canada about these important issues.

I just wanted to say how vital it is for governments at all levels to have good information and good policy advice, speaking as someone who has worked in governments as well as taught in the policy arena and now is the head of a think tank. In Canada we spend a great deal of money in the areas of social policy—on education, on student supports, on loans, on welfare benefits, on children's benefits—and it is very important I think for all of us to understand what the best outcome and the best effect of these billions and billions of dollars of Canadian taxpayers' money that are spent are. We like to say it's important to think before you act, and to do your research and have a very steady stream of knowledge that helps to inform decisions.

Right now, we are serving a number of different provinces in providing this function. We are also serving the federal government, and we will continue to do so. We provide good quality advice on the best inputs and ways and mechanisms of ensuring that Canada is making the right decisions for its people.

CPRN is unique in Canada in that not only do we take our evidence—credible research that has been pulled together—but we work directly with Canadian citizens to ask them for their opinions about the choices that need to be made in very controversial public policy areas. This unique opportunity to bring together citizens from across this country and to have them tell us and tell you about the Canada they want is really an important contribution, particularly for ministers who are having to make difficult choices.

As you know, Canadians don't always believe the evidence that's put in front of them, but they certainly know what they want you to do. We are a remarkable people, and that is I think a great opportunity to assure that Canadians are directly involved in some of these public policy issues.

That unique advantage is something that governments have valued very directly because in fact this is where the money is being spent by governments in social policy. Having that opportunity to have a neutral, non-partisan, third-party public space for dialogue and inviting Canadians from all walks of life to make comment here means in fact that you have the best advice possible.

The job of CPRN has really been to lead public debate on social and economic issues and to ensure that there are very innovative approaches available to us as Canadians to continue to provide the kinds of services that make Canada extremely productive.

Recently, we were here to testify before you on the situation of vulnerable workers in Canada. We found that more than half of the vulnerable workers in Canada lacked literacy levels that were important to ensure future productivity. This is good information that allows us, then, as Canadians, to determine what the next steps should be, what programs and policies should be put in place to assist Canadians to raise productivity levels so that we are all able to enjoy a sense of prosperity and inclusiveness in our country.

Having said that, I want you to know that we will continue, as an organization. It is going to be very difficult. It will significantly reduce our capacity to make the kind of contribution that we have made in the past. I think that overall it is an important function of government to ensure that this kind of relevant, credible, neutral, non-partisan advice is available, because truth only stands up when it's been battled. When you have that opportunity to come at it from all sides, then I think that you have a very robust piece of advice that is allowed.

I want to thank the members of the committee very much for the opportunity to be here today, and I look forward to your questions.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours): Thank you very much. I would now ask the Canadian Labour Congress to make its presentation.

[*English*]

Ms. Barb Byers (Executive Vice-President, Canadian Labour Congress): Merci beaucoup. Bonjour.

The cuts announced by the federal government in Budget 2006 and on September 25 amount to an attempt to silence the voices of Canadians, especially those who are not yet able to exercise their full citizenship because of barriers in their way: women, immigrants, workers of colour, aboriginal workers, persons with disabilities, young workers, and those who lack the literacy skills they need to fully participate. Today in my seven minutes I'm going to try to address the cuts and the needs of average Canadians in the areas of training, literacy, and the equality-seeking group rights.

In terms of training, despite record high profits and growing complaints about skills shortages, Canadian employers spend less than 1% of total payroll on training. That's well below the OECD average. The lack of access to training leaves workers trapped in low-paid, dead-end jobs, especially those four in ten Canadian adults who currently have literacy and numeracy levels too low to qualify for more than the most unskilled labour.

Meanwhile, a lack of opportunities for internationally trained workers to have their credentials recognized and develop technical language skills in English and French leaves many highly skilled workers underemployed. Barriers to post-secondary education mean almost half of young adults enter the workforce with no more than a high school diploma, if not less.

Compounding the lack of employer investment in skills training, which includes workplace-based skills development, apprenticeships, and literacy, are the federal government's cuts to spending on training. The cutbacks have amounted to more than \$10 billion since the mid-1990s.

The previous government took the following modest steps beginning in 2004. It allocated \$25 million to a training centre infrastructure fund. The funds have gone to match investment in training facilities, including some run by the building trades unions in support of apprenticeship programs.

There was \$30 million over three years allocated in Budget 2005 for the National Literacy Secretariat. Approximately a 25% increase,

the new money was to be focused on building community partnerships in support of literacy programs.

There was \$125 million over three years allocated in Budget 2005 for a workplace skills strategy focused on building partnerships between employers, workers, and training institutions, including through financial support for innovative pilot projects.

There was \$3.5 billion over six years promised in the economic and fiscal update of November 2005 for labour market partnership agreements with all provinces and territories. These moneys were aimed at expanding apprenticeship programs, literacy, essential skills programs, workplace skills development, and improving labour market integration of recent immigrants, aboriginal peoples, and marginalized groups.

By the time of the election of the government in January 2006, a small portion of the LMPA funds—just over \$1.6 million—had been committed by the federal government to the provinces of Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, and preparations were being made for other provinces and territories to sign their agreements and access the much needed funds. But shortly after taking office, the Conservatives put on hold the entire \$3.5 billion in promised funding, despite signed agreements with three provinces. And then there were the further spending cuts to training and literacy programs announced on September 25.

We call for a reinstatement of the \$3.5 billion federal commitment to labour market partnership agreements. The agreements would provide six years of sustained funding, which is crucial to begin to address the training needs of the most marginalized workers. This includes lower-skilled workers, underemployed internationally trained workers, and those facing some of the highest unemployment rates in the country, namely workers with disabilities and aboriginal workers.

Additionally, we call for the \$35 million cut to be reinstated to literacy programs, the training centre infrastructure fund, and the workplace partners panel. In unique ways, each of these programs was an innovative model of cooperation between workers, community groups, government, and employers. If Canada is to achieve its full potential in an increasingly global competitive economy, such models of cooperation must be developed further and applied to all aspects of economic development.

• (1125)

On literacy, our provincial and territorial federations of labour have been active partners with business in successful arrangements to deliver workplace literacy programs. These may be poised to lose their funding. Rather than cut the funding, the partnerships need to be celebrated and strengthened, and this model of excellence needs to be adopted by other jurisdictions.

Treasury Board President John Baird is quoted as saying he doesn't want to waste money on the repair work of adult literacy, and he wants to support children's literacy. I would say it isn't an either/or situation. We all know that children's literacy blossoms when the adults in their lives read and engage with them around literacy-based activities. Parents often choose to improve their skills so they can read to their children, help them with their homework, and set an example for them for lifelong learning.

On the cuts to women's programming, I want to speak briefly about the cuts to the Status of Women budget and the changes to the mandate. Despite the recommendation of the parliamentary Standing Committee on the Status of Women that their budget be increased by 25%, the government announced a 40% reduction. The cut will severely reduce the ability of the Status of Women to continue gender-based analysis of the federal government's programs, and policy and research. Both are essential tools that allow Canadians to monitor the progress or the lack of progress of women's equality.

On other equality-seeking groups, there was a \$10.8 million cut to stop smoking programs focused on aboriginal and Inuit people. It sends a clear message of what this government values and who they don't.

There's a \$5.6 million cut eliminating the court challenges program. This is a not-for-profit organization that for nearly ten years enabled Canadians to advance equality and language rights guaranteed under the charter. The minority government is ending a program that can legally and with civility redress historic wrongs, as well as improve Canada's public policies for the benefit of all Canadians. That act is going to be very tough on all Canadians.

We condemn the new government's actions and the callous and exclusionary decision-making progress it has used to slash funding for numerous programs that make a difference to all Canadians. These are very tough decisions that are going to impact a lot of people, as you've already heard this morning.

Thank you. Merci beaucoup.

• (1130)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours): Thank you very much, Mrs. Byers.

[English]

Now I will ask the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada to make their presentation.

Ms. Monica Lysack (Executive Director, Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada): Thank you.

My name is Monica Lysack and I am the executive director of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee. I commend the members who have initiated these hearings with the goal of better understanding the programs and the impact of the cuts. I do apologize. We were one of the last-minute changes, so you don't have my notes.

I want to be very clear at the outset that the CCAAC is both an advocacy organization and a policy shop. We are almost 25 years

old, and our vision has not changed, though it has become more refined and more clearly articulated over the years as we have developed policy expertise, learned from research, been informed by citizens, and collaborated with various levels of government to examine the child care policy and funding approaches that the evidence shows are most likely to advance an effective child care system.

The CCAAC works for a child care system that is high quality, inclusive, affordable, publicly funded, non-profit, and that serves as a cornerstone for progressive family policies.

Our membership reaches more than four million Canadians, including parents, caregivers, researchers, and students, as well as women's, anti-poverty, labour, social justice, disability, and rural organizations at the provincial, territorial, regional, and pan-Canadian levels. We are working together to bring about that which most other industrialized countries already have: an early learning and child care system that supports children's healthy development and parents in all of their roles, at work, at home, and in their communities.

Our contracts with the social development partnerships program advance specific areas of child care research and policy analysis of interest to both government and our membership. Currently, we have a citizen engagement project that supports communities to analyze child care policy and funding changes under the federal-provincial and territorial agreements and works with governments to advance effective, accountable child care policy in the future.

On the other hand, our advocacy activities are funded through membership fees and donations. The CCAAC has survived many challenges over the years and will continue to advocate for our vision, regardless of the actions of government that may hinder our work or attempt to silence our voices.

It is not the CCAAC as an organization that will be most hurt by potential cuts to SDPP projects such as ours. It is the citizens of Canada who will be the real losers. Those child care experts, Mum and Dad, will have fewer resources available to support them in the most important role of their lives. Children with disabilities will be turned away from programs that can't meet a range of developmental needs. Rural communities won't have the opportunity to develop models that address the special challenges of isolation and small, sparse population bases. We will lose the opportunity to learn of the economic impact of applying different policy options, and, most significantly, Canada will lose the opportunity to advance public accountability for the expenditure of child care funds.

I could go on and on with examples of what will be lost, but in the short time available, I want to move to higher ground. How do governments make policy decisions? Certainly decisions are influenced by political ideology, but when we look around the globe, particularly focusing on the member countries of the OECD, we see that the most progressive countries engage in research and analysis to inform their policy-making.

The Government of Canada, under the former administration, volunteered to participate in an OECD review of early childhood education and care. Canada, as it turns out, came in dead last out of twenty countries for our spending on children's programs, which was lower even than Mexico. By international standards, Canada's policy decisions put us behind every industrialized nation in the study. Why would a government voluntarily expose itself to such scrutiny when it is clear that we lag behind? I hope it was to learn how to strengthen and improve future investments to ensure that they are made wisely and that they achieve the outcomes we all strive for: healthy, happy, well cared for children and support for our economic productivity as a country.

•(1135)

Countries that operate in the most democratic way are most likely to engage in research; research and public dialogue are valued the least in autocratic countries. Is this where Canada is heading? Do we have a government that knows so much that citizen and community engagement is seen not only as unnecessary but as interference when government knows best?

Important research happens at various levels, from peer-reviewed work to community action—research that takes academic findings and turns them into practical, real-life models. The CCAAC has engaged in both of these forms. Our benefit cost analysis falls into the former category. Our strategy document, “Patchwork to Framework”, builds on research findings along with a pan-Canadian consultation to provide a practical working document that puts research into practice.

Our benefit cost analysis was done by two prominent economists, one whose previous work supported our position and one whose position was in opposition to ours. We're not afraid to have our policy recommendations scrutinized. Our goal was to learn from the experience. Incidentally, in this case it was the opposing economist whose position changed once the evidence was examined.

To summarize, the CCAAC is both a policy shop and an advocacy organization. Successive federal governments have contracted with our organization to carry out research and policy analysis, and

Canadians from coast to coast to coast rely on us to advocate for the quality universal child care services so common to our peer nations.

We're a frugal group. The CCAAC is very good at stretching a dollar, and our own accountability is above reproach. If our project funding is cut, it will be because we are too effective—compiling solid evidence on best investments and practice that this government is choosing to ignore—not because we are wasteful or irresponsible with public funds.

I'd like to close with a plea on behalf of those who can't appear before you—children and parents who have benefited immeasurably from this program. I urge this government to reverse the decision on the cuts and challenge them to give up their “government knows best” approach by continuing to allow the engagement of citizens in public policy dialogue.

Thank you.

Voices: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours): Thank you for your presentation.

As a matter of propriety— and with regards to that question, our procedures are the same as those that apply in the House of Commons— I would ask our guests to please refrain from applauding.

We will now hear the last presentation.

Mr. Wyatt.

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Wyatt (Executive Director, The Muttart Foundation): Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My hope is to leave you with you two key messages.

First, there has been, is, and always will be an intimate relationship between the federal state and the more than 160,000 voluntary organizations in Canada. There will always be a myriad of bonds between the nation and the 12 million Canadians who contribute their time to the public good through voluntary organizations. The challenge is to make that relationship strong, effective, and efficient, in an ongoing way.

Second, the voluntary sector initiative of 2000-2005 left us with the accord as well as the codes of good practice on funding and policy dialogue. These and the other legacy pieces were developed through working groups, involving equal representation from government and members of community organizations. That process was a profound step forward in forging the kind of approach to community organizations I just mentioned.

The recent decision to alter funding arrangements did harm to that relationship—a harm that must be rectified.

I appear today as a representative of the Muttart Foundation, a private foundation based in Edmonton. For more than a half-century, our foundation has been making grants to charities across Canada to help them deliver new or better services to Canadians.

Most if not all of you have worked with voluntary organizations in your constituencies and in your communities of interest. You will know, therefore, that the voluntary sector in Canada employs about 10% of all working Canadians, that it is responsible for almost 8% of the gross domestic product of the country, and that 45% of all Canadians donate time, while 85% of all Canadians donate money to the voluntary sector each year. But I would remind you that the community sector is, according to Statistics Canada, four times larger than the agriculture sector, more than twice as large as the mining, oil, and gas extraction industry, and more than 50% larger than Canada's entire retail trade industry.

This is all to say that there is, and must be, a relationship between Canada and the community groups and organizations described as the voluntary sector.

Canada and the voluntary sector share some common goals. Both want opportunities for people to improve themselves physically, mentally, spiritually, and economically. We both want people to have the opportunities to contribute to their communities and to be full participants in their communities and in our country.

To be sure, we will not always agree on the best methods to accomplish our common goals, but there are right methods to deal with those differences, and there are right methods of working together despite those differences.

In 2001, Canada and the voluntary sector signed a document that established the framework of the relationship that should exist between them. The accord and the accompanying codes on policy dialogue and funding did not seek to freeze in time any funding commitments, to hamper the development of new ideas, or to fetter the executive's right to make decisions. Instead, those documents speak to how we should work with one another for the benefit of all who live in this nation.

These commitments seem to have been forgotten during the expenditure review exercise. Programs were reduced or eliminated with no consultation, no forewarning, and no discussion of alternatives. That is inconsistent with the accord, it is inconsistent with the codes, and it is inconsistent with the positive relationship that should, and must, exist between the state and the voluntary sector.

To take but one example: cancellation of the Canada volunteerism initiative affects every voluntary organization in this country. Its work at the national and regional levels was meant to address a growing problem in recruiting volunteers and in training voluntary organizations in the most effective means of managing and utilizing those volunteers.

The cancellation of this program, the suggestion that the program is non-core, risks undoing much good that has already been done. It

risks the very viability of the one national organization whose role is to encourage volunteering in all its many forms.

Similarly, the elimination of the Charities Advisory Committee to the Minister of National Revenue has destroyed another vehicle for ongoing dialogue. This committee—emanating from a recommendation of the joint regulatory table, which I co-chaired—provided an avenue for conversations about the complex and confusing regulatory regime within which charities must operate. I served as a member of the founding advisory committee. The twelve of us came as volunteers to help build and maintain the relationship between the regulator and the regulated. As with the Canada volunteerism initiative, much good had already resulted, and more was forthcoming. And we have now lost that, despite the commitments in the accord and the codes to open, respectful, informed, and sustained dialogue between government and the sector.

• (1140)

Mr. Chairman, we know that governments must make difficult decisions, including decisions on spending, and we know it's unlikely there will ever be unanimity on what should be cut, but it is not in anyone's interest, not the government's, not the sector's, not the nation's, that we leave as damaged the relationship between Canada and the millions of people involved in voluntary organizations. No amount of saving will justify the harm that could result to programs and, more importantly, to the people we are all committed to serve.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman, the Muttart Foundation encourages this committee to recommend to the House a recommitment to the principles of the accord and its subsidiary codes. We encourage you to reinforce to the House, and through the House to all Canadians, the importance of the community sector to the quality of life we have come to enjoy in this country and the central place that community organizations make to that quality and way of life. And we encourage you to hold all future governments to the responsibility of working constructively and diligently with the voluntary sector for the benefit of all Canadians.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

• (1145)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours): Thank you, Mr. Wyatt.

I would like to thank all of the witnesses for your different presentations.

Now we will go to questions by members of the committee. First it will be a round of seven minutes.

Mr. Regan, please.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Thank you very much. *Merci beaucoup, monsieur le président.*

Thank you very much to all the witnesses who've come here today on very short notice. We really appreciate your taking the time and arranging your schedules to make it possible to be here. I know there were others who were also invited who couldn't come this soon, but I hope we'll have a chance to hear from them in the future.

The first thing I'd like to ask each of you is, what, if any, consultations or meetings have you had with the minister or her staff in terms of these issues, in advance of the cuts that were made in September? What consultations took place that you're aware of?

Ms. Sharon Manson Singer: If I could begin on behalf of Canadian Policy Research Networks, this government signed our contract, the agreement for four years' worth of funding, in April of this year. We were not consulted, nor did we have any opportunities for discussion with the minister or senior bureaucrats. We in fact learned of this cut through a posting on the Treasury Board website.

Ms. Barb Byers: In terms of the Canadian Labour Congress, we didn't have any consultations either in terms of what cuts were coming down or the change in the mandate, obviously, of Status of Women. So there weren't consultations. But certainly, since the government was elected, we've consistently sent over our positions on a number of issues to this minister and other ministers, so that people clearly understood the things we saw that were working in the Canadian context.

Mr. Phillippe Ouellette: On our end, there has been no consultation either in this form at all. In fact, we've been trying to get a meeting with the ministry for quite a while now to discuss a variety of issues, obviously, not just specifically what we have before us now.

Ms. Monica Lysack: The CCAAC, as well as our partner organizations, have requested repeatedly to meet with the minister and have been met with flat refusal. We've also requested to meet with Prime Minister Harper and were also flatly refused, despite repeated requests.

Mr. Bob Wyatt: Mr. Chairman, the Muttart Foundation wouldn't have expected to be consulted, but we're certainly not aware that any of the agencies we know of who are affected by these cuts were consulted in advance. It came as a bit of a surprise on the 25th of September.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chairman, one of the things the minister said in response to questions in the House of Commons about these cuts is that, "We are not going to invest...in advocates and lobbyists who do not get any literacy results on the ground". I'd like each of you to comment in relation to the cuts you've seen and on whether you think that's an accurate analysis by the minister of the impact of these cuts, and what your view is on that.

Mr. Bob Wyatt: Mr. Chair, Mr. Regan, I see nothing wrong with lobbying for literacy. I see nothing wrong with lobbying for equality. The lobbying isn't always done with government. Some of my colleagues in the field of literacy will spend much of their time advocating with employers to allow time for their employees to take the training. I see nothing wrong with suggesting that children deserve quality day care, and lobbying and advocating for that wherever it takes place.

One of the concerns of our foundation is that the Minister of Heritage announced in the House that there would be changes to the terms and conditions of grants and contributions and that now no federal money could be used for lobbying or advocacy, although those terms are not defined.

If we understand correctly what's being proposed, Mr. Chair, it may well be a breach of contract for anyone who receives any

federal funding to appear before a parliamentary committee or even to go to the project manager and say they need more money because this new need has emerged. I don't think that's what's intended. I think that may be the result, and I think that destroys public discourse in this country.

● (1150)

Ms. Sharon Manson Singer: On the issue of advocacy, I'd just like to add, Mr. Chair, that Canada has a bijural Constitution. In other words, we have two forms of law, and there is no barrier in Quebec civil law to advocacy for charitable organizations. So it is an unusual step for a minister to take to make that kind of statement on behalf of one side of government rather than on behalf of both of our governments. So with respect to the bijural situation, I think it is a point that needs to be brought forward.

Regarding our own case, with respect to Canadian Policy Research Networks, we are neutral, non-partisan. We do not advocate policy positions. It is not just me as the president who says this. I am repeating to you words that have been used in third-party evaluations of the work we've accomplished. CPRN has had third-party analysis from various sources, which was commissioned by the Government of Canada to evaluate whether or not we've provided value for money. The overwhelming result was that yes, indeed, we are innovative, non-partisan, and neutral, and we are a place that allows Canadians to really understand what policy options are going to mean for them.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I appreciate Mr. Wyatt's comments, and I agree with them, but is it your assessment that the preponderance of the funds that have been cut were going towards lobbying and advocacy, or did they have other impacts?

Ms. Sharon Manson Singer: Certainly in terms of knowledge dissemination, the cuts to the policy capacity both inside government and outside government are significant. When you're talking about a new economy, a knowledge economy, you need to know before you can act. Particularly in areas where government is spending a great deal of money—billions and billions of taxpayer dollars—it's very important to have some wisdom and knowledge before you actually intervene.

Ms. Barb Byers: Take a look at the infrastructure program, for instance, that was cut in apprenticeships. While we have employers and governments talking about skills shortages in the labour force in this country, the infrastructure fund couldn't have been seen to be lobbying in that, other than to get us more skilled apprentices.

If you look at the literacy work that's done by organizations all around this country, there is work done in the delivery, but there's also a lot of work that needs to be done in the background to know that we're heading in the direction we need to.

The workplace skills strategy, which actually brings employers and unions together to help work in governments and in other places, and determines what needs to be done across this country, provides for vital work that must be done. How often have you heard government say that employers and unions won't cooperate? When they do cooperate, they have their funding cut.

Regarding the literacy programs, we see on a day-to-day basis what needs to be done and the support for student programs. We just had an example here of someone saying they got a start because of something they did in the student program. There's probably a long list we could give you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours): Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Regan. Your time is up.

Mr. Lessard.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, thank you for accepting our invitation. What you have told us this morning has been very enlightening. Naturally, our role is to advise the House of Commons and to give our opinion. The decision that was taken concerning funding cuts seems to be extremely important for all groups concerned.

I must say we were quite surprised to hear that as a 13 billion dollar surplus was being announced; funding cuts totalling one billion dollars were being made to the various programs you've described. As we mentioned earlier, we certainly don't object to the disappearance, in whole or in part, of certain programs that serve no useful purpose. However, you seem to be saying that cuts have been made to certain essential services.

I believe it was Mrs. Lysack who asked how the government went about taking such important political decisions. At the very least, we know that this government doesn't consult the main stakeholders. That being understood, one wonders why this step was taken. I think one must refer to the document that came with the government's financial reference table and annual financial report that were tabled on September 25th. One can also refer to the press release.

My question is for all of you.

A press release from the Department of Finance and the President of Treasury Board announced that the new government has cut back programs that serve no useful purpose and are a waste of public funds; in fact, the government was cutting the fat. You mentioned that some very important programs were being targeted and that they shouldn't be. Are these cuts targeting what the two Departments have called useless programs, thereby cutting the fat? The Ministers still insist that they are cutting back on program spending, thereby ensuring a leaner government and more resources for programs that really matter. -

I'd like to take this a bit further so as to get a better sense of what is happening. It's your turn, so to speak. Mr. Wyatt was telling us earlier that four million Canadian citizens are volunteers, in some way. If I understand correctly, this amounts to 7% of the GDP. That's extraordinary. We're talking about a generous social safety net, but it seems now to be at risk, because of this operation.

In conclusion, I'd like to ask you if you think that cuts were made to the fat, to useless programs. This question is for all of you.

● (1155)

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Wyatt: One's perception of waste will depend on where one sits. Was there evidence that these programs were wasteful? I take a look at the list. Is the program for RCMP training on driving impaired by drugs a waste or a frill? I don't think so.

Is the recruitment of volunteers, many of whom are delivering federal government programming directly or indirectly, a frill? I would argue not. I would argue that Canadians don't believe so.

Are there frills? I don't know, because I haven't consulted with the organizations involved and their clients. That's the problem many of us are talking about today. There was no consultation. There was no opportunity for us to produce evidence. We see programs that we in the sector believe are important to Canadians suddenly categorized as bad value for money, or non-core. We have very few vehicles within which we can have a conversation about where that came from. I think that's unfortunate.

Ms. Monica Lysack: Let me put this right down on the ground. We can talk about a higher level and the value at a higher level. Let me talk about the three-year-old with spina bifida who can't get into a child care centre. This little program that was funded through this partnerships program helped centres develop the capacity to be able to include children with diverse abilities in their program. Is that a waste? I say it is absolutely not. Every child has the right to a happy childhood in a place where they're cared for and people can adequately meet their needs.

Because of Canada's overall inaction in our early learning and child care policy, we have a workforce that is ill-prepared to deal with even the most typical children, never mind children with spina bifida. So in terms of waste and trimming the fat, if a government thinks that cutting the most vulnerable families with the most challenges is cutting the fat, then you're going in the right direction. This is doing it. This is achieving it.

● (1200)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philippe Ouellette: Thank you.

We're talking about inefficiency and waste, but it's quite difficult to prove with regards to the 50,000 student jobs in Canada. The whole of the postsecondary educational system must be taken into account. For 10 years now, government student grants have been diminishing, mostly those grants to the postsecondary educational system.

We were already requesting more funds and now we are learning about new cuts. The system needs more financing. It will be very difficult for students to find a job without the help of the government student placement system.

Perhaps students, rather than supporting themselves by having a job, will resort to student loans. At the end of a four year bachelor of arts program, they will have a 35,000\$ debt, a tremendous amount for a student.

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): That's all the time we have for this round. I apologize.

We'll move to our next questioner now.

Normally we just have one person substituting, but I think Mr. Martin wants to share the question. I'm going to leave it to the will of the committee if they want to allow this.

Are there any issues there?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): No, but Mr. Martin looks confused.

The Chair: He's just trying to see what he can get away with.

Mr. Martin, we'll give the both of you seven minutes altogether. How does that sound?

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Thank you. I'm just confused about these cuts.

I want to thank the folks who came today to present. I'm not going to repeat any of the questions that have already been asked. You've put on the table the most immediate impact you see from these cuts and how they will affect communities and the social economy sector across the country.

For me the question is, what is the government trying to achieve here? It's probably a question you're asking, and I think all of us should be asking: what's the endgame? If the CPRN doesn't get further funding, their future is in jeopardy as of April 1 next year.

The Canadian Labour and Business Centre didn't come today because they've shut their doors. They will be done at the beginning of December.

This was a coming together of differing perspectives and views on some really important issues, particularly when you consider the employability study we're doing here, trying to bring the various partners together. People like Perrin Beatty, who is not on the ideological left, was very critical. He seemed to think this agency was a good agency, was doing good work, was very valuable, would have been important moving forward, and it's gone now, for all intents and purposes.

Agencies we talked to that we wanted to bring before the committee have now gone underground. The chill that has gone out is unbelievable.

As some of you know, I served as a member of the provincial Parliament for thirteen years. I remember when the Conservatives came in, in 1995, and they began to do some things. The first thing they did was cut 21.6% out of the income of our most at-risk and vulnerable citizens. It was suggested at that time that was to send a message, "Don't mess with us. We have an agenda here. This is where we're going."

I remember sitting and talking to Mr. Harris in the airport one day, before he became the premier, and he said, "You know, Tony, I really feel sorry for you guys." This is when we were government. He said, "You guys are trying to do things and make things happen and work with groups and fix things." He said, "We just cut." I guess if—

An hon. member: There must have been more to that story.

• (1205)

The Chair: She's out of line.

Mr. Tony Martin: "We just cut"—regardless of the impact, and that's it.

The question I'd like to ask is, what do you think the government is trying to achieve? What is the endgame? Does anybody want to answer?

Ms. Barb Byers: I started that in my presentation. The effect of this will be that if they want to silence people, to drive people underground, to make sure we are not just stalled on equality issues and access to job issues but move backwards, that's exactly what these cuts are going to do.

We take a look at who's going to be the most affected. It's going to be people who want to get jobs, young workers, aboriginal workers, workers with disabilities, immigrants, workers of colour, a whole range of people who have been excluded from the workplace, from our perspective.

When you're excluded from the workplace, you're excluded from a piece of society as well. What's the first thing somebody says to you after you introduce yourself? "Hello, my name is", and the next question is, "What do you do?" That's what's happening.

The programs that have been cut are programs hitting a broad range of people. The fact that the Status of Women has said their mandate is no longer equality is absolutely shameful to anybody who knows what the Status of Women is in this country. We may say women are equal, but the reality is that in our workplaces and our communities we're not treated that way at all. We're not treated that way in the House of Commons and we're not there in the House of Commons.

It's all those sorts of things. What's happening is people are being silenced, and it's about driving people underground and backwards.

The Chair: You have about a minute and a half left, Mr. Martin.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): All we have to do is listen to the tone in the House of Commons to appreciate that there are not enough women there.

I wanted to link the issue of community sector and literacy, because it seems to me these cuts have made a real deep cut in the community sector, linked to student employment, literacy, child care, and many of these programs.

For example, some of the community groups I've met in Victoria that are involved in literacy called me and indicated that the workplace literacy, which the minister referred to, will leave a whole group behind—those who are not at work and those who fall at the lower levels of functional literacy, levels 1 and 2. So by dealing simply with the minus 3 levels of literacy and by not attaching that to the community sector, we will be leaving a whole sector behind.

I'm wondering if any of you would comment on that disparity or discrepancy between workplace literacy programs attached to private sector and literacy as a broader concept.

The Chair: You have fifteen seconds for a real short answer.

Ms. Barb Byers: Fifteen seconds? I'll try to talk really fast.

The Chair: It was a long question.

Ms. Denise Savoie: You can continue the answer later on.

Ms. Barb Byers: Quite clearly, the answer is that the minister said they're going to have national programs. If you don't have programs at the base—and that's both in workplace and community, because we know there are a lot of people excluded from the workplace, which I just referenced.... So you have to have both. You can't do one without the other; it's not an either/or. You need both and you need them at the base, as well as the national work that supports the people doing the on-the-ground work.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Byers, for making that as short as you could.

Ms. Barb Byers: Fifteen seconds.

The Chair: We're going to move to the last person in this round.

Ms. Yelich, you have seven minutes.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Thank you.

I have a couple of questions. First I want a point of clarification from Ms. Byers. What did you say about the aboriginal smoking programs that have been cut? Were your remarks exactly that we, the Conservatives, don't care about aboriginals?

•(1210)

Ms. Barb Byers: I think it shows quite clearly what the government values and who they don't value. I think it's a matter—

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: That's all I wanted. I wanted to hear the clarification, and that is what you said. I take real offence to that, because I come from Saskatchewan, which I believe you do too—

Ms. Barb Byers: Yes, I do.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich:—where aboriginals are allowed to smoke in places where non-aboriginals aren't. Does that mean Saskatchewan doesn't care for their aboriginal people either?

Ms. Barb Byers: I might have some things to say to the Saskatchewan government, but this is about the work that you've done.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I would like you to take your campaign there, thank you.

I would like to go to the Muttart Foundation. First, do you accept that a new government has the prerogative to deviate from the spending priorities of its predecessor, and should they be able to chart their own course in terms of allocating tax dollars?

Mr. Bob Wyatt: Mr. Chairman, of course.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Then you can quite agree that some of these are new and innovative ideas that we're having more focused spending.

I also want to quote a letter that you wrote on the 29th to the Prime Minister about programs assisting the disabled. In that letter you said the programs were being eliminated.

We had Ms. Caroline Weber here, the director of the office for disability issues in the Department of Human Resources. Mr. Lessard asked her pointedly about the allocation and how it affected people with disabilities. Her response was, and I quote, "I can assure you that no programs explicitly targeted for people with disabilities were cut."

In light of Mrs. Weber's statement, I respectfully ask for a clarification of what exactly you are referring to when you state that programs assisting the disabled have been eliminated.

Mr. Bob Wyatt: Mr. Chairman, Ms. Yelich, I'm delighted the department is telling me that. It's more than the Treasury Board told us; it's more than the department has told us. The Treasury Board told us that \$13.8 million was being taken out of the social development partnerships program. That program makes it very clear that a major part of its role is to serve people with disabilities. Absent any further information, one has to assume that some disability programs are somehow going to be affected.

Going back to your first point, I certainly don't disagree with the right of any government.... The budget process is about government deciding what its priorities are. What I object to is government ignoring commitments that the state has entered into. The accord and the codes were not documents that belonged to the previous government. They are state documents; they were commitments by the state to a relationship with a sector that is critical to this country. That's what I object to, Mr. Chairman.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have one more question.

You said every volunteer from coast to coast is affected by the cuts. Could you forward a document with a list of these? There were others who had made a really blanket comment about...I think one of you said as many as 100,000 people—or organizations—would be affected. I don't want the answer now; I would like to have it in writing. Exactly which organizations were affected, and how were they affected?

We, too, are policy-makers and advocates, as you are, and we hear some people applauding these effects, and some of those that were not cut felt that their work was good and they impressed upon the Treasury Board not to cut their program.

So I would like to see who you represent, categorically.

That's all I have for questions, and I'm sure Brian will ask the next one.

The Chair: Who would you like to have answer?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I would like the two who made a statement in the presentation. It's unfortunate we don't have copies of their presentations here, because there were a few of the representatives who said there were 100,000 groups that were affected. I would like to see who they are.

The Chair: Ms. Byers.

Ms. Barb Byers: Mr. Chair, can I just suggest that as a starting point, the members of the committee might like to refer to the news release that was sent out by the Movement for Canadian Literacy and ABC Canada, which sent out a comprehensive list about a week or ten days ago of the literacy groups across this country—I believe there was only one province that they didn't have the stats on at that point, and that was New Brunswick. But in every province and territory there was a cut in literacy alone.

So that's a good place to start.

● (1215)

The Chair: Does anyone have that information to forward to the clerk? At some point in time, that would be great.

Mr. Storseth, you have a minute and fifteen seconds, if you want to finish off.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Perhaps I'll address my question to the Canadian Policy Research Network. I have a couple of questions.

I was looking at your grant funding, and maybe it was just me, but I couldn't find any other organization similar to yours that has a funding arrangement in the same manner that you have.

I was wondering if you could explain a little bit to the committee about the funding arrangement you set up with the federal government. Also, are you going to continue to put in proposals for new grant funding?

Ms. Sharon Manson Singer: Thank you for the question.

Yes, you're right. CPRN does have a unique formula for funding, and it has grown over time. Again, this third-party, independent evaluation really looked at the specialized functions of the Canadian

Policy Research Network, that it's an important resource for the Government of Canada in informing the policy-making process.

I think that's been critical, in terms of our assistance to the Government of Canada as a neutral, non-partisan source of credible and highly relevant research policy-making. You can't get that kind of resource inside government and it doesn't exist elsewhere outside of government. The lead time in academic research is very long, and it's often not policy relevant.

So it makes it very important for the Government of Canada.

We will continue to put forth contracts, but contracts or project funding do not provide the kind of core infrastructure support that allows us to become an information broker for Canadians on this credible research, and in particular allows this knowledge dissemination in both French and in English, in 1.6 million downloads. That's incredibly heavy traffic for any think tank, and we are robust in that area—very robust.

The Chair: Thank you.

That's all the time we have.

We're going to move to our second round, which will be five minutes of questions and answers, and we'll start with Ms. Brown.

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you very much for organizing this panel, which I think, in its makeup, is representative of the fact that Canada is a pluralistic society, one in which the power of the state is restrained by active and engaged citizens who join into groups to accomplish their aims. I realize that this restraint on the power of the state is very disappointing for my friends across the way who have just come into government, but it's a reality that those of us on the Liberal side are very aware of and one that I think makes Canada a much richer country.

We see before us, Mr. Chairman, a network—kind of a virtual network—connecting scholars doing research, volunteers, who are often working to fill gaps in our human service sector, workers trying to maximize their ability to contribute, and students trying to move forward.

One of the witnesses was surprised by the cuts. I think that would suggest that the person did not live in Ontario when we had the same finance minister, because surprise is one of their favourite tactics. Those of us who lived through it have simply been waiting for the axe to fall, and I would predict that the next budget will be a hundred times worse.

So yes, I do think it's sending a message, Mr. Martin. We've all heard of the book and the movie that came out called *Manufacturing Consent*.

Now, considering what Mr. Regan said about squelching advocacy and that kind of thing, I'd like somebody to comment on whether this set of cuts, probably followed by further cuts, could be interpreted not as manufacturing consent, but rather as crushing dissent and the capability of citizens to express their dissent with government programs.

Then I'd like to ask Mr. Kroeger a question. If the government continues in a direction that is symbolized by these cuts—that is, cutting the work of scholars and the information they can provide, cutting the work of the Labour Congress, cutting help to students, and so on—what do you think, Mr. Kroeger, the result will be for social cohesion in this country?

That's all I have.

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Kroeger.

Mr. Arthur Kroeger: The principal effect of the cuts, as I read them, is first of all that governments will be making more decisions blindly, because they will not have the base.... There's a lot of talk about evidence-based decision-making, and the less evidence you have and the less research you have, the more you are making decisions by the seat of your pants. I can't think that this would be good for social cohesion. I cannot think that for governments to function on the basis of ideology or preconceptions, rather than on good evidence, is a good way to foster social cohesion in Canada. And I would hope that ways could be found by which these organizations could continue to function as they have in the past, because they have made very important contributions.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Would you like to comment, or would somebody else like to comment on this idea not of manufacturing consent, but rather of crushing dissent?

The Chair: Ms. Byers.

Ms. Barb Byers: Again, this is creating dissent. Earlier there was a reference to value for money. Well, there is nothing to say that any of the programs being cut weren't valuable. There is no evidence to show that. What there is evidence to show is that these groups being affected take a dollar and stretch it and make it two dollars. They work very, very hard at the community level to do that. And what this is going to do is create a country where the gap between those who have and those who don't have gets larger. And yes, there will be resentment.

The social problems we talk about now in terms of need, in terms of young people, or people who are excluded from citizenship in this country, are going to get worse, and we're going to have larger social problems to deal with.

My background, my previous life, is as a social worker. I worked with kids on the street for many, many years, and I know that it takes a long time to have some sense of progress, but if you don't put the money into child care at a young age, if you don't put the money into communities, if you don't put the money into literacy, you're going to have much larger, much more expensive programs and problems later on.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Just to follow up on that, would anybody like to comment on the connection between the cuts to the most

vulnerable, plus students, plus workers, plus research, etc., and the statement in the last budget about the larger allocation for corrections for, and I quote, the anticipated “increase in inmates”?

The Chair: I would just warn whoever answers the question that you have about ten seconds.

Very quickly, Mr. Wyatt.

Mr. Bob Wyatt: Mr. Chairman, in a speech I made some time ago in connection with a youth program that was being funded by the federal government, I asked what questions were being raised by the previous administration. You can pay for the program or you can pay for the jail cell. You're going to pay for one of the two.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wyatt.

We're going to move down to the second questioner, for five minutes.

Mr. Lessard, I believe you're going to start with a very short question before you pass it on to Madame Bonsant.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: We'll share whatever time is allotted.

A well-respected and widely-read Quebec editorial writer was asking, as did earlier my colleague, what lied behind this operation. He says he has the impression that these cuts were decided by two guys “off on a bender who took a turn to the right”. This idea has spread. People are still wondering what this operation is all about.

As for those of you who are close to citizens who are committed to helping others, is this an ideological operation that aims to change the social net that has been built with sweat and tears over the years?

[*English*]

Ms. Barb Byers: I think this is not just an attempt; this is an attack on that social fabric. If you look at it, the government obviously is looking for dollars to spend on its war effort, when quite clearly Canadians are saying we shouldn't be there. We want to support our troops by bringing them home alive.

This is a situation where it is an attack on the social fabric that we've built up. That's why people at this end of the table feel so passionately about what's happening. It's not about our individual programs. It's about the lives of the Canadians we come in touch with every day and the difference it's going to make to them on the ground.

So it is an attack on our social fabric. It is an attack on our progress as a country.

• (1225)

Mr. Bob Wyatt: Mr. Chairman, perhaps I can add to that, just very briefly.

I think it's very dangerous for any of us to impute motives, particularly to impute what many Canadians would say are bad or evil motives for decisions. I would not want to be a member of the cabinet that has to make decisions about what gets cut and what doesn't get cut. I would like to think that I would take the time to talk to people and find out about things, to think through the consequences of those decisions, rather than to simply make an announcement that takes everybody by surprise.

Frankly, we in the voluntary sector are all spending a great deal of time in a crisis mentality instead of serving the Canadians we're supposed to serve. That's to no one's advantage.

The Chair: Madame Bonsant, two minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): I agree with Mrs. Byers.

I'm happy to see you here. You're very sharp. It's good to see that you know what's going on in the real world.

The army is very expensive. Because of its way of thinking, the present government has cut long term funding for education; however, the government is willing to build jails and to incarcerate 12 year old children.

Since these cuts have been made, how do your volunteers feel? These people don't cost much, in fact, they're free. Do you think they're completely discouraged? Do you think you'll lose the support of very important people who might stop helping these groups?

[English]

Ms. Sharon Manson Singer: If I might just intervene, I'd like to correct the notion that volunteers are free, because they are not. Volunteers are a wonderful addition to Canada, and they make a great deal of difference in every single community, but they need support as well. The infrastructure of the Canada voluntary initiative helped to provide that infrastructure. The 12 million volunteers we have were supported in communities to provide the kinds of services necessary.

I just don't want us to think for a moment that volunteers are free. They need support. They need nurturing. They need training. They need supervision. They need assistance in order to give as richly as they do in our country.

Ms. Barb Byers: I would say that this is what will end up happening. Sometimes when people get hit with a cut, yes, there is discouragement. But people also see a greater goal here, and people will come back together. We're not going to give up, for example, the fight for a universally accessible, affordable child care system in this country until we get it. Women's organizations aren't going to back out on advocating for women's equality. It will be done under an atmosphere of oppression, of what we have to fight against, instead of what we're fighting for.

The Chair: That's all the time we have. I'm sorry.

We're going to move to the next round.

Mr. Martin, for five minutes, sir.

Mr. Tony Martin: I have a couple of things, and then I want to put three quick questions. If you can answer them quickly, we can get through them.

In terms of who the government consults, some of the commentary that's been made out there, and the long-term impacts of these decisions that they're making, certainly the *Ottawa Citizen* is on the record as saying the \$3 million a year the federal government has provided to the CPRN has been well spent on social science and research, whose results have sometimes told the government things they'd rather not hear. That money is going to be eliminated. It seems that the government would prefer to hear from bureaucrats whose work they can control, but that's a dangerous habit if they're hoping to make sound policy decisions.

In some instances, we know who the government is listening to. For example, they've just signed a \$24 million contract with a firm from Chicago to advise them on procurement policy. They're not talking to Canadians or Canadian firms with the mandate to do the kind of research you've been mandated to do. They're out there contracting with American firms.

Having said that, to the Muttart Foundation, in the letter you sent to the Prime Minister—I have a copy of that letter too—you went on to say:

...that funding cuts...that affect voluntary non-profit organizations—amounting to some \$200 million of the \$1 billion total—will hurt some of our most vulnerable citizens and will create social deficits that will require far more than \$1 billion to repair.

So of my three questions, one is to CASA. Do you think the private sector will in fact do the hiring that is now being done through the student summer career program?

The second question is to the Muttart Foundation, on the contract you signed in April. Do you have any legal recourse if the government signs a contract with you, walks in, and unilaterally breaks it? Maybe others might want to comment on that. That presents to me as a little strange.

And I would want some comment, if we have time, on the comment you made in your letter that this would take \$1 billion to repair if we go ahead with these cuts.

• (1230)

Mr. Toby White: I understand that the government doesn't want to be giving funding to businesses or organizations that would be hiring a student anyway or ones that would be hiring a student at the same rate. I understand the desire to look for efficiencies there. But there have been studies done on the summer career placement program, and the vast majority of organizations are hiring students they otherwise would not have been able to afford. There was a study done in 1997 that showed that less than 20% would have been able to hire a student otherwise.

We're looking at a funding cut that is much larger than that, and after a couple of years it could cut the budget of that program in half. The consequence is that students will lose jobs. There probably will be a small number of organizations that will be able to still hire students, but for the most part, what we're fearful of is that this does mean students are going to be losing jobs.

Ms. Sharon Manson Singer: The Canadian Policy Research Networks will not be pursuing legal recourse with respect to our contract. We think it's much more valuable for us to continue to contribute our resources in the area of knowledge rather than fighting a legal battle that's lopsided in terms of size. I don't think it's in the best interest of any of us to go that way. It's much more important to talk about what's going to be substituted and how that can be improved.

If we think policy capacity is there within government to perform in a way that the outside, third-party research does, I don't think that's possible. I can say that not only as the president of a think tank, but as a professor of public policy over many decades and as a deputy minister in provincial governments, where I observed first-hand the policy capacity that exists not only in the federal government but across this country.

It is a difficult situation in Canada. We are thin on the ground when compared to OECD countries and certainly when compared to our neighbours to the south. The intellectual capital that exists in Canada to give good advice is quite thin on the ground, so this is a significant blow.

The Chair: Would anyone like to add another comment?

Mr. Bob Wyatt: Some of the research on child care and crime prevention indicates that for \$1 spent on prevention you will save \$14 in treatment.

The Chair: Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Ms. Byers, I thought I was having some problems with my headset earlier, because I thought I heard you say that since the mid-1990s, \$10 billion had been cut in your area. Is that true?

Ms. Barb Byers: Compounding the lack of employer investment and skills training—which includes workplace-based skills development, apprenticeship, and literacy—are the federal government's cuts to spending on training. These cutbacks have amounted to more than \$10 billion since the mid-1990s. However, the Liberal government attempted to put at least some of that back.

• (1235)

Mr. Brian Storseth: So following Mr. Regan's comments, and now we have Mr. Coderre here, the former government came to you before each of these cuts and wanted to know what you thought of them.

Ms. Barb Byers: I can't say they came to us in every instance, but we certainly had an opportunity to put forward our positions.

Mr. Brian Storseth: When one of the greatest slash-and-burn governments in the history of Canada promised \$3.5 billion days before an election, were you not a little suspicious?

Ms. Barb Byers: Suspicious...?

Mr. Brian Storseth: Okay, never mind. You said that aboriginal workers and people with disabilities were one of the keys to labour force shortages, and that we needed to address this.

Ms. Barb Byers: Yes.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I agree 100%, and that's what this committee is trying to address. You said that a vast majority of the \$3.5 billion was designated for this, and that you had a strategy or game plan to address the issue. This is one of the crucial problems we are trying to resolve. It is pertinent to my riding in particular.

Obviously, it would take too long for you to tell us the entire strategy, but perhaps you could table with us the essence of the strategy or policy framework that you were going to spend the money on.

Ms. Barb Byers: We've tabled with your government all sorts of documents about what we see as important in workplace strategies. The work that was going to be done on labour market partner agreements, our efforts on the workplace skills strategy—these are things that, when you talk about how to get organizations to move, only come about when you get people working together.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Sorry, I don't mean to be curt, but I would like to see something in relation to aboriginal workers and people with disabilities. That's the area that interests me. Could I get you to table that with us?

Ms. Barb Byers: The money was aimed at a number of equality-seeking groups, including aboriginal people and recent immigrants.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Well, if I could see your strategy, maybe we could implement some of those things.

Ms. Barb Byers: Sure, we can drown you in documents.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you.

Ms. Barb Byers: The question is, will you read them and will you talk to us about them later?

Mr. Brian Storseth: We'll express that dialogue later.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Ms. Lysack, I want you to explain how the spending reallocations adversely affected your organization. What dollar amounts have been cut from your organization, and how will this affect you?

Ms. Monica Lysack: At this point, no dollars have been cut from our organization. We have two contracts through the social development partnerships program. We were very surprised by all of this. We had no inclination that these were coming. When we heard it in the media, we actually had to scramble around trying to find somebody who could tell us whether we were being cut.

We will be allowed to carry on the two research projects we are engaged in. Overall, it's not the CCAAC that's going to be harmed by this. We will survive.

In response to the chill factor people have spoken about, I want to assure you that when we met with our members, who came from coast to coast to coast to discuss this issue and its impact on them, we talked about whether or not we would take a lower profile. Our decision was: in for a penny, in for a pound.

If there's one thing you can't take away, it's our voice.

Mr. Mike Lake: So you haven't been cut?

Ms. Monica Lysack: Our—

Mr. Mike Lake: Just clarify it for me, yes or no?

Ms. Monica Lysack: Let me be clear. We don't receive any core funding. As someone pointed out, CPRN has a unique funding arrangement. Unlike most of the voluntary sector, we receive no core funding.

Mr. Mike Lake: During the previous Liberal government, how much funding did your organization receive? Was it hundreds of thousands, almost a million dollars?

Ms. Monica Lysack: Over our 25 years in existence we have certainly received—

Mr. Mike Lake: In the last thirteen years.

Ms. Monica Lysack: I can't answer exactly about the last thirteen years.

Mr. Mike Lake: Estimate the last five years.

Ms. Monica Lysack: We have received...I don't know, \$500,000, maybe. I don't know.

Maybe somebody else knows.

Mr. Mike Lake: How many child care—

The Chair: That's all, Mr. Lake.

I'm sorry, but we're out of time.

Ms. Monica Lysack: I do want to respond to that.

The Chair: Sure, just quickly, please.

Ms. Monica Lysack: I had this question about how many child care spaces we've created asked by a member at the committee of finance. It is not our mandate to create child care spaces; it's our job to comment on public policy that influences the development of child care spaces.

Following that meeting, when that member suggested outside of the House of Commons that if we changed our position perhaps our organization might be eligible for government funding, I said thanks, but no thanks. We stick to our vision. Our vision is to promote effective public policy for developing a child care system.

• (1240)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That is all the time we have.

I know that Mr. D'amours wanted to add one question.

We have some committee business we need to get to, so Mr. D'Amours is going to ask a quick question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for allowing me to speak for a few seconds.

I would ask each of the five organisations, if they will, to answer my question by a simple yes or no.

Do you find it strange that the Parliamentary Secretary, who is here today, would ask you specifically which programs have been cut while the government refuses to speak to you individually?

An hon. member: That's a good question.

[*English*]

Ms. Barb Byers: Can we say *absolument*?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: On a point of clarification, I think they understood what I meant when—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chair, four groups haven't answered the question.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Monica Lysack: Yes.

Mr. Bob Wyatt: I find nothing strange anymore, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Barb Byers: We haven't completed our research.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Phillippe Ouellette: Yes.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right, we had one politically correct answer. There we go.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: The question was because there was a...every volunteer and every organization, and one person said 160,000. It was a point of clarification.

The Chair: We won't have that debate right now.

I want to thank all the organizations that came in today. I apologize for missing your presentations earlier.

I know that here in Parliament we don't always agree on policies and things, but you came to express your concerns, and we appreciate you taking the time out of your schedules to be here today.

What I'm going to do now is to move into committee business. I know we have to deal with a few issues here. We have a few motions, and if we could get right to that, that would be great.

•(1240) _____ (Pause) _____

•(1245)

The Chair: Okay. Let's start.

I know we have about four motions before us today that we need to deal with, and then we just want to go over some housekeeping things as well before we adjourn at one. I know there are a few people who need to get out of here.

Let's go to the first motion. Ms. Yelich, can you speak to that motion?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Yes. Thank you.

I put this motion forward to postpone any meeting occurring on an opposition supply day if a matter under discussion in the House falls within the purview of Human Resources and Social Development Canada, because the opposition supply day is very important, and if it's specific to our topic, then most of us would like to be there, because most of us are interested in the debate. I just wondered if this committee would be respectful of that, given that the critics are here at committee, and it really makes it very difficult.

The Chair: Are there any points of discussion?

Go ahead, Mr. Lessard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I believe that the motion was not appropriate, in the present circumstances, because in committee, we can table a motion with regards to any situation. I believe that the motions that are examined during opposition days don't all require the same amount of attention from the committee's part, in light of its obligations. The committee will have to routinely decide. I will therefore vote against the motion.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

I assume that would indicate that you are...

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: That were specific to our...

The Chair: Right. Fair enough. Yes. I understand that.

Is there any other discussion on this motion? All those in favour of the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: I think what Mr. Lessard was suggesting, though, is that on a case-by-case basis, we should maybe consider that. I think we'll look at that. I appreciate the fact that as critics and parliamentary secretaries, you're required to be in the House for that kind of debate.

We're going to move to Mr. Regan. I know he has a couple of motions here. Mr. Regan, would you like to speak to the first one?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

As you can see, I'd like to move that in consideration of the funding cuts to Human Resources and Social Development Canada announced on September 25, 2006, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and Status of Persons

recommend that the government continue funding a summer career placement program at the 2005-06 level and that the chair report the adoption of this motion to the House forthwith. I think we heard some of the reasons for this today from the witnesses from CASA, in particular.

The Chair: Is there any debate on this?

Mr. D'Amours.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chair, may I request a recorded vote.

[English]

The Chair: All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: It would appear that the yeas have it.

Mr. Regan, go on to your second motion, sir.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I'm not going to read the motion. You have it before you. I move the motion as presented. Is that sufficient?

We also heard today about the importance of programs like the workplace partners panel in terms of skills development in this country. Clearly there's a strong reason I think for the government to rescind this cut as well.

The Chair: Is there any discussion on this motion?

Let me guess. You'd like a recorded vote.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: If you please, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. I'm catching on. Good.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Things are looking up.

[English]

The Chair: All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: It looks like that is carried as well, Mr. Regan.

We're going to move to our fourth and final motion for today.

Mr. Martin, would you like to speak to your motion, sir?

Mr. Tony Martin: No, I'd only like to put the motion.

I think when you consider some of the challenges out there for community groups that are trying to provide housing for people, who are finding it more and more difficult to find affordable housing, we need to push the government to put money in place to actually make that happen and to guarantee it so that those who are working in the field have some confidence they will be able to continue to do good work.

•(1250)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

Is there any discussion on this motion?

Ms. Yelich.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I think we'd like to ensure confidence in this program. I would like to suggest that we quickly do a study regarding this program. I think it would be much more helpful than a blanket renewal of spending.

There's obviously a problem, and we have put more money into homelessness. It would be nice to be able to study it to see whether we're targeting and focusing our spending.

The Chair: Okay.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I'd like to make a recommendation to have a study and maybe suspend the employability....

The Chair: Okay. My suggestion is this. If you'd like to present that in a motion, maybe you could do it at another point in time. Give us 48 hours and we could then probably debate the motion as well.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: On the study.

The Chair: Well, we're debating the motion here.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I know that.

The Chair: It is a separate issue. Certainly, if you would like to study it, I'm sure we can do that.

Are there any other comments?

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: I'd like a recorded vote, please.

The Chair: Okay. It will be a recorded vote.

If there's no more discussion, we'll have a recorded vote.

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: That is the last motion we have before us right now. We're now going to go in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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