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Chair

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.)): We have quorum and we can start.

Ladies and gentlemen, members of the committee, last week we discussed gender-based budgeting and that Dr. Clara Morgan would be giving us a synopsis of what it means. You all received a document, which is an IPU document. That was easily translated. It was just to give you a flavour for what gender-based budgeting is, what the parameters are, and which countries have done it.

Dr. Morgan has now got her overview of her study. I'd like to distribute it now and give Clara an opportunity to explain to us what the process entails, and then we as a committee need to focus on which aspect of gender-based budgeting we want to do. We have to be very focused because it is a huge topic, as you will hear, and we need to narrow it down.

If we can get Clara to do a presentation for about ten minutes, then we'll take some questions and answers, and then go through and figure out what focus we should look at. Is that agreeable?

Then we are ready to give Clara the floor.

Ms. Clara Morgan (Committee Researcher): Thank you.

At the end of the last meeting, the chair asked me to provide you with a short presentation on gender budgets. The clerk has distributed by e-mail a publication from the Inter-Parliamentary Union. It's called *Parliament, the Budget and Gender*. This is a lengthy document—I'm sorry about that—but it's the only document that was available in French and English. The Commonwealth Secretariat does have gender budget information, but it's not translated yet, so it's only in English. If you were to look at chapter 4 of *Parliament, the Budget and Gender*, page 55 in English, 61 in French, it has a gender perspective on the budget, so that's a useful chapter. If we were going to focus on one chapter in this document, as sort of a solid background, it's chapter 4.

The publication covers, generally, information on budgets, which is a useful thing to know when you're tackling gender budgets because you really need to know about the budget process and good budgeting practices and principles.

The chair mentioned that it would be useful to distribute a document that I was working on in the summer. Because this committee had talked about gender budgeting earlier in June, I thought I'd better get familiar with this topic because I didn't know much about it. So I did my reading, I did my homework, and this is

what I put together. This is the other document that you have, the shorter document, which is about nine pages. I'm not sure if everyone has one yet.

First, let me clarify that I'm not an expert on gender budgets. I think there are people out there who have much more expertise. I know, generally, a little bit about it, so I'm going to just walk you through the document and tell you just what is inside it, really briefly.

The document is organized into what a gender budget is, why gender budgets are needed, the implementation process of a gender budget, tools for effective gender budgeting, and the role of parliamentarians in encouraging and implementing a gender budget. This document will eventually become a publication on the Library of Parliament website.

Just the basics: what is a gender budget? According to the literature on the topic, a gender budget is a budget that accounts for direct and indirect effects of a government's expenditure allocations and revenues on both men and women, and groups of women and groups of men. I'm not going to read the whole document to you, but I just want to highlight the main points.

Why do we need gender budgets? This is based on the literature. The World Economic Forum has pointed to the inefficiency of gender inequality. These costs are manifested by lower levels of productivity and competitiveness and reduced levels of well-being. Experts who recommend the use of gender-sensitive budgets know that a national budget can be an important tool for addressing women's equality. So gender budgets are tools for addressing women's equality.

A national budget that is gender sensitive recognizes the underlying inequalities between women and men and redresses them through the allocation of public resources. So that's what the literature says about gender budgets and why we need them: because they can correct the imbalance that exists between men and women.

The implementation process of a gender budget. If we were going to tackle the topic of gender budgets, we'd have to look at it through the whole gender budget implementation process, the actual budget cycle. A useful implementation of a gender budget requires data. It requires disaggregated data and indicators. So your starting point, according to the literature, is to have the correct data available to undertake a gender-responsive budget. The document lists other areas that are highlighted by experts of gender budgets, such as the location, scope, reporting format, and who will be involved in the process.

The gender budget literature makes another point, that a gender-responsive budget has to be part of the budgetary cycle.

The literature identifies several factors that contribute to the successful implementation of a gender-responsive budget—for example, there needs to be a commitment from both government and civil society stakeholders, and the availability of technical expertise and data that's aggregated by gender. So there are certain factors that make gender budgets successful in their implementation.

There are a host of tools for effective gender budgeting that have been developed by experts in this area. I've listed them according to expenditures and revenues. I am not an expert on these tools. The committee would require people on that who have extensive expertise in how to develop these tools and how to use them as part of the budgetary process.

There are really only three experts in the field of gender budgets who have tackled this area. They're Rhonda Sharp, Debbie Budlender, and Diane Elson. These are three very well-known individuals who have worked on this topic extensively.

The role of parliamentarians in encouraging implementing a gender budget is another aspect to this document that I have included. This also includes studies that this committee has undertaken.

Parliamentarians can encourage a gender-sensitive approach to the budget during the pre-budget consultation process or when reviewing the government's estimates and departmental performance reports. In addition, parliamentarians can request research staff to conduct more in-depth gender-based analysis of budgets, government expenditures, and program spending.

Members of this committee have noted in their report, *Gender-Based Analysis: Building Blocks for Success*, that Canada needs a more effective process to do a gender analysis of the budget.

So this is just to give you a brief overview. It's all in the document. That's basically it.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you.

Any questions?

Ms. Neville, followed by Mr. Stanton.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): I don't know whether this is a fair question or not: are there countries that do gender-based budgeting successfully?

Ms. Clara Morgan: From the literature, I see that results have been mixed.

Australia has been at the forefront of gender budgets. I have a really interesting article from *The Parliamentarian* on gender budgets, which we probably want to circulate, but I'd like it translated first into French. South Africa has also been on the leading edge in what they call gender budgets. But if we were going to look at role models, we probably want to look at the Australian one.

I would recommend that we have information from people who have more expertise, to ask these types of questions.

The Chair: Mr. Stanton, and then Ms. Minna.

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

In order to understand properly how this should work, it appears from the outset that we have to look at the budget cycle and how data is derived. It might be a bit of an exercise to bring this together.

I think we had two meetings on gender-based analysis in the last session. In looking through the gender lens at the budget processes, it would seem that at least some departments are doing that already. I think we even talked about the extent in particular that the Department of Finance is using a gender lens to look at the programs. I'd have to go back to look at the reports, but I recall that the work they're already undertaking has become more and more a part of the culture. It's a foregone conclusion that before anything gets released at the public level, that consideration has been part and parcel of developing a budget.

It's great to understand more about this, to assure ourselves that this is in fact happening. I'm coming back to what specific things we would be hoping to achieve as a committee by investigating gender budgeting. Are we doing it for the purpose of equipping ourselves better—for example, to consider estimates and supplementary estimates when the time comes? Perhaps if we had a set objective there, it might be easier to narrow that focus down.

I give that really more for consideration for our discussions.

• (1545)

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Minna.

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

I think there could be a number of objectives. Obviously, the first one is to ensure that the gender budgeting that's being done now is done in a meaningful way across the board. My understanding from the last time that we met with the Department of Finance is that they're not using gender-desegregated data as part of the basis, which already gets you down a different kind of road. I remember that was one of the questions asked, I think, by one of the witnesses or by one of us at the time. I do remember that issue coming up.

Listening to experts would allow us to see how it's being done or not done, because if we're not going down the right track, we will find, five years from now, that we actually haven't been doing it—not really in a meaningful way that matters. The other thing is that it hopefully allows us to see which department, if any, is actually trying it, aggressively or not. Because my sense has been, government-wide, that there are some stellar examples, like CIDA, and there are some others that just talk about it but don't really do it. I think we maybe need some pressure on how it should be done, and what the outcomes, when they've done it right, can be. For instance, I think we should look at gender-based budgeting and how it impacts things as part of our study.

We should probably identify three or four areas that we can use as templates to show, when it's used, this is what happens. I thought, as a suggestion, we could use poverty and working women, and how gender-based analysis actually affects the outcomes of policy for eradicating poverty; women in the legal system—it's not that big, but it's an area of critical importance in terms of women being able to access the judicial system and how they are treated when they are in the system; women in the military, including the spouses, but also the soldiers themselves; and racialized women would add the other element. If we could look at those four that I'm suggesting, and break those areas up, then we could say we are doing gender budgeting, but we are applying it as we learn it to these areas with experts. What would the outcome be if it had actually been used right?

I think there are people out there, like the women who were just mentioned recently, who could work with us to actually help us see, so we could focus in on a number of areas and identify the problems in those areas. I think that would allow us to be concrete and at the same time specific.

The Chair: Mr. Pearson is next, then Madame Boucher and Madame Demers.

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

I've noticed that when you have successful initiatives, you talk about how many of them happen at various levels of government. I know, for instance, in the city of London they are taking some looks at this, but they're trying to target it—much like Madame Minna has just said—at the poorest of the poor, so to speak; that's where they're targeting it.

The Ontario Association of Food Banks had a large meeting last week in which they were trying to challenge civic governments and the provincial governments, in their own gender-based things, to do the same thing. What we're trying to do is set up linkages to aboriginal communities that are in the northern part of Ontario. I toured there this summer, and it wasn't as bad as I've seen in Africa, but it's definitely the worst that I've seen in Canada. It got all of us as a group to sit there and say if we're going to do that but it somehow bypasses these individuals, that's not so good.

I was wondering if you could tell me—when you say let's have other partners take part in this at various levels of government—and maybe through you, Madame Chair, to the rest of the committee, because some of you might know—are there successful models in Canada provincially, civically, or even in communities that work? You say here that the most successful ones start from the ground up.

Ms. Clara Morgan: Let me look into it and give you.... I have seen, but I can't recall. There have been gender-participative budgets at the Canadian municipal level—not gender specifically, but more participative budgetings. If you'd like me to look into that, I can gather information for the committee on that topic.

• (1550)

Mr. Glen Pearson: That would be helpful. Thank you.

The Chair: Madame Boucher.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): I know that my team also did research on the budget. We found that around 60 countries, such as Norway, Sweden, etc., are carrying out projects like the ones we want to carry out.

Those countries studied three main categories of issues. The first is called “Gender-responsive allocations”. Resources are specifically targeted either to men or to women. When the target group consists entirely of women, they call it a budget responsive to women's needs.

The second category is called “General allocations”. It includes most of the expenditures. The challenge consists in determining whether the allocations are responsive to the needs of women and men in various parts of the population, as we said, in different groups and different governments.

The third category is very interesting, given that there is a difference between women and men. It is called “Allocations for equal employment opportunities”. It seeks to promote gender equality in the public service. The targeting takes into account the differences between women and men, because they do not have the same needs in the working environment.

Clearly, women and men do not have the same sensitivities. There are differences, our needs are different from the needs of men. Our research showed this, and I wanted to share it with you.

The Chair: Thank you. I am sorry, have you finished?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: This could help the committee to set specific targets, because otherwise, it will be “at large”, as they say in English. We could go all over the place without finding a long-term solution.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

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

This is really a broad field of study, and it is not easy. I listened to what Ms. Minna said, what you said and what Mr. Stanton said. I was very much moved by Mr. Pearson's words, because I am very concerned with the condition of first nations and Inuit women.

I read a report that said that a woman had to call a shelter for battered women because she had no place to stay. It was easier for her to call a shelter for battered women to find a warm place to stay for one, two or three nights, because she was unable to get housing at a reasonable price. Therefore, I must say that we should really focus on those parts of society that are obviously experiencing hardship that is getting worse all the time.

I think that things are constantly getting more and more difficult for first nations and Inuit women. The same applies to the entire population of these communities, as the men are also having a hard time. However, I think that if we adopt gender-based budget analysis, we could probably find some ways of really making a difference in terms of health, housing, education and food. We can probably find ways to intervene and to improve things. I would be very glad, because this is under federal jurisdiction. I am even more glad because I do not think that this is under provincial jurisdiction; they leave us alone. You will have my full support.

I think that, as Ms. Minna said, we must study certain aspects more specifically, such as the legal aspect. However, we cannot cover all the issues. We could wander around for a long time if we tried to do that.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam.

[*English*]

Ms. Neville and then Ms. Mathyssen.

Hon. Anita Neville: Just a very quick comment.

I think in Manitoba you'll find some gender-based budgeting going on, and certainly a community group is actively working with the government on gender-based budgeting. It may be under the Provincial Council of Women, I'm not positive, but I can give you some names to contact.

The Chair: Ms. Mathyssen.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Ms. Neville made the remarks I was going to make. We have, close to home, an example we could get some information from. I would concur that we take a look in Manitoba.

•(1555)

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Davidson.

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

I just want to say it seems as though we're starting to get a little bit focused on this huge issue, and that's great. I think we definitely need to focus on it.

I think some studies have been done, or some work done anyway, by some other non-governmental groups that perhaps we can take a look at as far as gender budgeting in budgets and so on and the reaction and what has happened. Maybe we can find some of those past works and make use of those as a basis as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

What I am hearing, therefore, is there's a consensus to move on a very focused basis. And the focused basis, if I heard correctly—we

had done our economic security of women and poverty of women, especially in the rural areas, in the aboriginal areas, and immigrant women—was a key factor for us. So we could look at gender-based analysis, based on what has been suggested, poverty and the woman.

The next one Ms. Minna suggested was on women and the legal system. I guess everybody has seen this article about a 19-year-old woman who died in prison. It's amazing. What is it? Why is there this discrepancy between the treatment of women and the treatment of men, and where is this problem coming from? So there's one aspect that would require us to look at it from an economic perspective and one aspect would be the justice perspective, the legal perspective. This one has a lot of resonance with a lot of women who are asking what's going on in this area.

And thirdly, if I heard you right, was women in the military. A lot of us have heard from women in the military, or spouses of military men, of the level of inequality they seem to face. So we could focus and say we'll take three or four subjects of that nature and perhaps move forward with them—we have to agree on that first—and then look at what resources, what sorts of experts we will want to call. They will be departmental people because we need to understand from departments. As Ms. Minna mentioned, when CIDA gives money to donor agencies, it demands gender budgeting and demands gender sensitivity, and we don't do it in our own area. So perhaps some departments in Canada, in the federal government, might be better equipped than others, and we might be on a search mission and find some very good benchmarks or stories we can relate to.

So number one is agreeing to the focus, number two is people we would like to call, and number three is the timeframe.

Madame Boucher.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I would also like to emphasize employment equity. In every part of town, in every city and in every rural municipality, we hear horror stories that show that women are never equal to men as far as employment is concerned. I would like us to look at...

Poverty also exists in the rural regions. I come from a poor background, and as I have lived in poverty, I feel very close to the problems of the poor.

I would also like to discuss the specific needs of men and women. We must understand our differences before we can find solutions. We must keep in mind that men and women are different. We cannot... We must understand this, and they must understand it too.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Boucher, I think you are re-emphasizing the point that poverty, and poverty in different areas, is critical. Our report on economic security has targeted that women get poor because of certain gender differences. And we have listened to Dr. Clara Morgan, and I think we need to find out about our money and its impact. Is it having impact?

So I think if we can agree on certain things we want to focus on, move forward and get that out of the way, then we can go forward with the next round.

Mr. Stanton.

• (1600)

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I don't disagree with where we are at this point, but I'm not too sure how we're making a connection between the four areas that were proposed: working women, the justice system, the military, and race. Those are the four groups that no one would disagree are segments of women in society that perhaps would deserve having us take a focused look.

How do we connect the dots between that group of women in society and gender budgeting? We're talking budgeting, so it's principally finance, that is, the allocation of dollars. We put words to the picture here. To cut to the chase, are we talking about whether government programs are properly allocating to those groups? That kind of takes us down the road of really now talking about whether government programs are sufficient in addressing issues of economic security. You can see that it's easy to take this discussion to a different place. How can we understand it?

The way I see it, when we talk about budgeting, it could potentially be three things. First is how much is allocated to specific, targeted groups, perhaps much like what we've seen here. Second could be the decision-making process. Does it take gender equality issues into consideration? Then, perhaps, third is what's happening in the aftermath. Once a program or a budget is implemented, do we see the desired outcomes? Even if you did make all the right decisions, are those things happening?

I'm still not clear. Maybe I'm just not grasping it, but if someone can help me out here, I would appreciate it.

The Chair: We'll go to Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: I'll try, and my colleagues around the table will help if I don't get there.

It's not so much how much money is allocated to which envelope, although that obviously has an impact at the end of the day in terms of what government policy at that time happens to be. Quite often, it is how programs are then designed to spend that money and the criteria around those programs to spend the money.

I'll give you an example. I was working with some immigrant women who desperately needed training and upgrading back in the late 1980s. The program offered by HRSDC at the time required that you have grade 12 and be somewhat fluent in the English language to access it. Well, it meant that all those immigrant women were excluded. The criteria shut them out. That's why I put down "racialized", as well as the other lines.

Another example is, for instance, a policy like the child tax credit. It's about \$7,000. If you have money to spend, you can take advantage of it, but if you're a low income to poor person, and a woman, in particular, and are in under the labour force, you can't access it, because you have to have money before you can get it back. It's not a refundable credit.

Those are just a couple of examples. What I'm seeing is that the criteria and policy, and how policy is designed and then delivered, may miss the mark of what the intended objective is overall. Do we want to eradicate poverty? Do we want to address the issue? Does it

miss because we didn't do the right analysis, and therefore, the criteria that was designed actually leaves out a big chunk of people? Quite often that is women, and usually minorities are the ones who are more disadvantaged.

The tools we would use would be to look at.... First what I would do is have us take some time to have hearings with people who have expertise in gender budgeting to understand the criteria that are required to do gender budgeting properly and to see a few examples of where it might have been done. Then I would move on to take a look at some of these areas we've identified and see how, if applied properly, it might have worked in some of the current policies that exist within our system. Out of that we might be able to make some recommendations about how things might be corrected, and then by extension, advise that the model be used government-wide in the preparation of budgets. If you do the right gender budget analysis before budgets are prepared, you're likely not to have the wrong outcome at the end.

• (1605)

The Chair: Mr. Stanton, you have a very valid question. And there are two tools that could be used.

I come from a public finance background. I am not an accountant, but have a public finance background. And there are two ways in which budgets can take place—drill down, or go upwards. The drilling down is based on what the Department of Finance has as revenue. And moving upwards is your grassroots sectoral analysis by departments.

You can use two tools that the analyst has given us: look at the gender-disaggregated public expenditure incidence analysis, and the gender aware policy appraisal. Those are what we ask the experts to do. But basically, you can take the issue of poverty, for example, and say to yourself, here is what we, the government, spend on social programs. We need this to have impact, as we want to eliminate or alleviate poverty. You can then ask, is it having an impact?

When we did our study on the economic security of women, we found lots of incidents when this was not happening. So we need to go back to the drawing board and ask, why not? There is something wrong. We are all taxpayers. There is something wrong with a system that is not addressing this very key issue, and we're spending a lot of money on it.

Did I see your hand up, Mr. Cannan?

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm new to the committee; I'm just subbing for someone else and listening in.

I echo my colleague Bruce's comment. I'm just sitting back and thinking about your public finance perspective of drilling down or coming from the bottom up. The fact is, it doesn't matter how much money you're spending, if the program is going in the wrong direction. So we have to take a step back.

And it's not necessarily the budget, but goes back to the core. As Bruce was saying, it's about the mandate of the committee and the policies and the criteria.

I'm having trouble getting my head around studying budgets, if you're looking at programs.

The Chair: No, and I appreciate that you're new.

This is gender-based budgeting, and we've gone through gender-based budgeting and its impact.

Departments do their budgets and they push these upwards to the Department of Finance. And Finance turns around and says, well, what's the value of this program, as it doesn't meet the philosophy of the government, etc., etc.? That's fine, as there's a political side to it. But there is also a social side to it, and the departments, when they present their budgets, are the ones who have to look through a gender lens. Is it having an impact?

Say you want to alleviate child poverty. To alleviate child poverty, you need to put things in place—child care, for example, or affordable child care. If that is the mandate, then you ask, is it having its impact?

We don't know. We're sitting as the Standing Committee on the Status of Women and our job is to ensure that we help women in poverty, or families in poverty, to be able to address their issues.

So if the Department of Finance comes with an analysis, for example, that having an income of \$21,000 is too rich for a person to be able to access the child tax credit, or \$21,000 is too poor for a person to access a working income tax benefit, then you sit there and ask the question if that's the poverty line. Those are the analyses we will have to do, or questions we will have to ask, because we need to be asking intelligent questions so we can make intelligent recommendations. That's what I think our discussions are going to be about.

You're more confused than you were before, right? Well, that's normal for anybody new coming to the committee. This gender-based budgeting is a.... It's not that we go after the finance department, but that we go and ask departments to come before us, and we have to choose which areas we want to focus on. That's why we're saying that if poverty is an umbrella, are we focusing on immigrant women, rural women, and aboriginal women? And then we should ask, for example, INAC, the aboriginal affairs department, what they do when they present their budget to the Minister of Finance. What sort of lens do they look through?

Those are easy things, I guess, from my perspective, but perhaps they are very difficult to comprehend.

• (1610)

Mr. Ron Cannan: I appreciate that. I'll sit and listen a little more.

I guess from my perspective as the father of three daughters, all I know is that I give my wife and daughters the money, and they give me a little bit of whatever is left over.

The Chair: That's not what the Minister of Finance does, no.

So are we confused or agreeing?

Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think we may be at a point where we can get some scope to this. I wonder if we could go back to Dr. Clara Morgan. If you were to

frame the mandate of this study, what would it be? That would be my first point.

And then the second part would be, how would this study...? We're going to take some time on the part of this committee; we're going to have testimony. What will we be doing to help women in Canada through the course of this work? Because that's ultimately what we're trying to do. What will this either help us to do, or more principally...? We're here to bring recommendations to the government on how it should conduct its business and policy-making and decisions. So how would we come at that question? How could we scope this study?

Ms. Clara Morgan: According to the literature, when you are putting an agenda or budget into practice, one of the things is to scope it. I think it's up to the committee members to determine the mandate for the gender budget. It can simply be making the budget responsive to gender or it can be submitting a parallel gender budget at the same time as the budget is submitted. It's up to the committee members to decide how far you want to take a gender budget initiative. It could be incorporating more from the civil society groups into the gender budget-making consultation process. It's really up to you how far you want to take this.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: I haven't heard from Madam Mathysen. Irene had done some work on this.

The Chair: Did you want to speak, Ms. Mathysen?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: I have been listening carefully, and my initial desire was to find out how this works. We've heard a great deal about it. How do you actually take this idea and make it work and make it an action that creates the greatest possible good? That was the reason I thought to start with the group close to home, with the Manitoba government, because they're just beginning. They've done some background work, preparatory work, analysis, and they've had the help of a community group. I want to know what they did and how they have begun this process of putting it in place. Because they are quite determined it's going to be something that bears fruit, has a result, and achieves the goals they've set out, and because I know so very little about that, I wanted to know what we need to do in a very practical way.

The Chair: Yes. If you look at page 60 of what you got from the IPU, it gives you a framework to measure.

[*Translation*]

I do not know where the French version is.

[*English*]

It says it's box 35, and then if you go to the U.K. one, which is box 41, you can get your head around the framework to measure gender equality. I think, Madame Boucher, it comes to your point of employment and poverty.

For the benefit of the clerk, can we have a specific request so she can limit it, and then we are all on the same page?

Ms. Mathysen, could you repeat what you said? I hope you haven't forgotten.

•(1615)

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Let me see. I wanted to know exactly how gender budgeting worked. My thought was to go to a resource that was close by—in this case, the Manitoba government—to find out what preparatory work they did, what analysis they did, and work within the community in order to begin this process, because they've only just begun. I wanted to know how you start something like this. How is it that you grab hold of gender budgeting and make it happen?

The Chair: All in agreement with that thought process?

Yes, Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: I agree, but just to add that for part of that discussion of how gender budgeting is done, it wouldn't hurt to look at some other jurisdictions—like Australia, as was suggested—that may be further down the road than some of the local ones, and bring in some other experts, so we can get a handle on exactly how it's to be done and what impact it has when it's properly done. Also, when is it done wrong or superficially or as lip service, and when is it real? It's one thing to say you're doing it, but it's another to actually be doing it right. I think that would be the first thing.

Then I think the areas we suggested earlier would be areas that we would look at as examples of, when applied, what impact they might have on those areas, and that would give us some templates.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Minna.

Mr. Pearson.

Mr. Glen Pearson: I agree with what Ms. Mathysen and Ms. Minna said. I might want to include Great Britain, because they've just done their poverty-reduction strategy. They missed some of their targets—not by a lot—and as a result they're reassessing. It might be good to see where they're at in their reassessment.

The Chair: Fair enough.

So those are the marching orders we're giving the analysts?

Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: I have one other suggestion, Madam Chair. We talked about understanding how gender-based budgeting works—Ms. Mathysen's point—and more importantly, learning about other jurisdictions, particularly those that have successfully implemented gender-based budgeting.

I think a third point would be to know to what degree gender-based budgeting is currently being used or applied here within the government.

That's probably enough to get started with.

But I come back to my first point. This really is a learning exercise for committee members. Ultimately, you want to be able to use this knowledge to better assess when you're doing estimates or supplements or when financial considerations are being considered by committee, so that you are then better equipped to use that information. I think a potential recommendation that might come is that we can share that knowledge and make recommendations

around how the government might be able to use the information to better shape its policy and decision-making processes.

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: Just to finish something, Mr. Stanton put his finger on something that's very important, and that is the estimates. If our work is done right with respect to identifying and figuring out how this is done, it should be that in future, when estimates are done, they will in fact reflect the gender-budgeting data and information in them so that members of all other committees, not just ours, will know what impact policy is having in that context in those departments.

•(1620)

The Chair: I think that's what our end result is going to be—the impact of our policy and the dollars we invest. I call it the return on investment—do we get it, or do we not.

Yes.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Danielle Bélisle): I just wanted to summarize. So it's agreed that the committee start by focusing on how gender budgeting works by looking at other jurisdictions, and thereafter to focus on specific areas.

If you want to amend...?

Mr. Bruce Stanton: I think one component would be that we also talk to a witness from Treasury Board, even if it's just one, just to understand to what degree gender-based budgeting is already being utilized by various departments.

The Chair: Members of committee, I think you received an e-mail from the clerk advising you that the coordinator for the Status of Women Canada can't come on Monday at 11 o'clock or 4:30, as she has to go to a funeral. The officials of Status of Women Canada cannot come without her, or it's easier to get them all together. Is 4:30 or 11 o'clock agreeable? I think five people said yes to 11 o'clock on Monday, and others did not respond.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: I prefer 4:30.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: I prefer 4:30.

The Chair: So we'll have the meeting from 4:30 to 5:30 with the coordinator from the Status of Women Canada and some of the staff. We'll be talking about estimates and departmental performance.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: On the schedule for this study, how many meetings are we envisioning?

The Chair: That's a good question. Once we get the framework and the parameters from the analyst, she will be able to give us an idea of how long Manitoba took. We need to learn from their experience. It also depends on the number of witnesses we decide to call and how we go around it.

Will we have the document by Monday?

Ms. Clara Morgan: Do you want a work plan first?

Yes, you can have it by Monday.

The Chair: If we have the work plan on Monday, perhaps we can spend from 3:30 to 4:30 on the work plan. Then at 4:30 we can hear the witnesses from Status of Women Canada.

A voice: We don't have a problem with that.

The Chair: That's good. So we will do that.

Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: Last week when we finished our meeting we were still discussing other issues, other possible studies. There were motions, and there was the report we had done in the spring—the issues I'd been involved with. At some point that might also tie in with this.

• (1625)

The Chair: That's the court challenges program?

What is the desire of the committee?

Mrs. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I was maybe mistakenly under the impression that we were going to receive a list of all of the topics that had been suggested, and then we would determine where to go from there.

The Chair: That list of suggestions for future business was prepared and given to us, if you want an extra copy. We all have a copy of it.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: But were we not going to choose from that where we would go?

The Chair: Yes. The copy talks about Canada's sixth and seventh combined report on the convention, female migrant workers, gender and trade, gender-based analysis, and gender budgeting.

On what Ms. Minna is suggesting, if we take any of them.... For example, I think somebody suggested Sisters in Spirit, and it's a huge study. If we want to have immediate gains or show something before the break, we could probably do a court challenges program in three or four weeks.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: So we're going to do that instead of the gender-based budgeting?

The Chair: No. Once we get the work plan on gender-based budgeting, we will be able to determine what is the timeframe we require and what sort of witness, because we will go through the list of potential witnesses we might have.

Meanwhile, to ensure that we are busy and doing some work, the option that we could do, perhaps—it's an option suggested, and then it requires the committee's approval—is to take a review of the court challenges program, which might help us through the way while we are doing some filling up on the assignments on gender-based budgeting.

Madame Boucher.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Budgeting the “gender whatever it is” will take time. Afterwards, perhaps we will see what we want to work on. It will take time. The entire team wants to do this work. That seems to be a logical place to begin, afterwards we can go on to other ideas.

The main point is choosing the budget. We should focus on that and choose something afterwards. That is where we must begin, because it will take time if we want to do a good job.

[*English*]

The Chair: Can I make a suggestion, then, that when we look at the plan on Monday and as we discuss the work plan, if we feel that there is going to be enough time that we would not be able to manage to get the gender-based budgeting through by December, that we have some manoeuvrability, that we can on Monday decide whether we can proceed with that?

Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, we can respond to the concerns of Ms. Davidson, Ms. Boucher and Ms. Minna at the same time. Earlier we said that we wanted to see what is currently going on with someone from Treasury Board, and what is being done to raise awareness regarding gender budgeting. Afterward, let us go to see what is happening in Manitoba and what they are doing there. When we adopt this tool, we will also see what is happening with budgeting for first nations people. The programs that are available to both men and women of the first nations are a part of the budgeting for the first nations. It was one of the programs that the first nations used to challenge certain events, results or decisions. I think that we could do this in the same study, and reserve a special space for the first nations. We will see what happens if this domain is no longer funded and what happens if it continues to be funded. I think that we can do all that.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Stanton, and then Madame Boucher.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

In terms of looking at some of the other things that we did talk about, we have essentially six meetings coming up next week. One of those is going to be, as discussed already, for the Monday, the half-hour, continuing the work plan and the presentation by Status of Women Canada. We also have the supplementary estimates that need to go in. We also discussed the reports.

On this issue around the court challenges program, we're all aware that this has been a matter of some political debate. I honestly believe we should get on with things that are going to be constructive. I understand the opposition's interest in bringing that sort of an issue in front of us. I think we're all aware of the controversy that the decisions taken have created. But in all honesty, we have some pressing business in front of us here.

I agree with Madame Demers' suggestion that some of those will be overlaid with the speakers we're going to have in the course of our study on gender budgeting. But we have the estimates, we have the review of the reports from the last session, we have gender budgeting in front of us, which will probably take us well into the new year, and I would suggest, for what it's worth, that we continue with that.

In our work plan discussions, I note, for example, we have other motions here from Madame Mathysen and Madame Demers, and the government has put some in play, and then we also have this rather comprehensive document that we can work from in looking at other materials.

That's my opinion. I recognize that other members may have a different view of that, but I certainly am not supportive of putting a review of the court challenges program into our agenda.

The Chair: I think Madame Demers had asked that it be done simultaneously, and I'm hearing from Mr. Stanton that he has asked for multiple ways of doing the gender-based analysis.

All I was suggesting is that when we look at the work plan, if we feel there is room to put in something else, that we do. We have the supplementary estimates. We have sent an invitation to all ministers regarding the response to our report. We haven't received any responses yet, so there will be some fill-in time. For that filler time I am seeking the committee's direction as to what you would like to do. We cannot cancel meetings. We need to be proactive and put something in place. The one suggestion, which Ms. Minna has made, is the court challenges program. It doesn't have to be political; it is a study that can take place. But I am at the will of the committee.

Yes, Ms. Minna, and then Madame Demers and Madame Mathysen.

[Translation]

Ms. Boucher will have the floor after that.

[English]

Hon. Maria Minna: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The reason I was suggesting this—and I actually thought of it as we were sitting and talking—is that the court challenges program is another one that also affects women in a direct way. I know there have been major court challenges that have dealt with the rape shield and other things. I'm not trying to look at cancellations or not. It's important with respect to the impact, and it's a contained enough study. It's a small program; it's not a major program. I think it's only worth a couple million dollars in the sense of the amount of money in the budget. As I say, it's not a major program. It's not huge, and it could be handled in maybe a couple of meetings. But it also to some degree would have relevance to the gender-based analysis we're doing in terms of the legal aspect of the work, because we're talking about women and the legal system. So actually it's an extension of that to some degree. It complements the other side. It's not a new study on the side; it complements. It's not something different. If I had come to you with something that was totally out of the ballpark, then you could say that we had better start from scratch and figure it out, but this actually complements what we're doing.

•(1635)

The Chair: Madame Demers, and then Ms. Mathysen.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Stanton, I am very sorry, but we are dealing with politics. This is not Sunday school. We must absolutely get to the bottom of some issues, and I think that this is one of them.

I tabled more petitions in the House today. Up to now, 5,425 women have signed and petitions to reinstate the program are still circulating all over Quebec and Canada.

I did not know that Ms. Minna wanted to discuss this, but I think that it is a very good idea if we can do it in a non-partisan way. It really is a political issue, but we can discuss what a suppression of the program means to women. Which groups does it affect the most, how does it affect them? Perhaps we can reach a conclusion together. Perhaps we will suggest to the minister that he should review the file because we think that those people are right. On the other hand, we might say that it is not really worth the effort. We too, may well conclude that it is not worth the effort. However, I do not think that we should throw in the towel too early. We should not refrain from reviewing a program because we are afraid of political issues. That is what we are here for.

I do not want to hate you. You are my adversary, but you are not my enemy. Nevertheless, sooner or later, we must get down to debating real issues.

[English]

That's it; that's all.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam.

[English]

Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to support Ms. Minna and Madame Demers, because I think the issue of court challenges does indeed fit in with gender budgeting. We've had a year and a bit to find out the ramifications of the cancellation, and I would like to know that. Plus, I think that the objectives of any budget are to serve the people of the country. That's the whole idea of gender budgeting, to serve the people who contribute to this country. So I think it all fits, and I would be very happy to see that as part of it.

The Chair: Madame Boucher.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Let me say, in answer to Ms. Demers, that we really are involved in politics; I understand that very well. However, we must also be reasonable. This has been debated in every committee for a year. I took part in several committees and every committee discussed this. Therefore, the issue has been studied by all the committees.

I am working toward finding solutions. Therefore, I do not want to study an issue that has been debated for a year and a half. Actually, if you want a report, every committee has one. For instance, the Standing Committee on Official Languages has one, as does the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage and other committees as well. We see them everywhere.

I was a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. We travelled all over Canada last year and we heard about it. The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage also dealt with the issue. There are complete files about the issue.

Therefore, I suggest that we study something else that could help women, because this issue has already been studied by other committees.

[English]

The Chair: Madame Boucher, are you telling me that this study has been done and you have a report somewhere?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: This issue was discussed by the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, by the Standing Committee on Official Languages and by another committee the name of which I forget.

[English]

The court challenges program, *on l'a fait*, the standing committees on official languages and justice and human rights.

The Chair: So all of the committees mentioned in here have done a study?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: We already have written reports on this. So why should we waste valuable time by writing more of them? Three committees have made public reports about it.

[English]

The Chair: Has the government responded to it?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I cannot answer you because I am not a minister, but I know that they are studying it, and so on. Sooner or later, we will surely get some answers. We already have written documents about this issue. Therefore, we could go on to something else.

• (1640)

[English]

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Neville first, then Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: I'm going to pass, Madam Chair, as Madame Boucher made the point.

The Chair: Okay, that's fair.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I was not aware that the court challenges program has been before three committees, but I think it's of particular interest to this committee, Madam Chair, because of the impact of its cancellation on women.

I can give you one particular situation I'm familiar with. It's called the Sharon McIvor case out of British Columbia. It's a case involving aboriginal women who lost their status because of legislation implemented by the government in 1986, called Bill C-31, which had unintended consequences for aboriginal women and diminished their status as they had progressive generations.

What happened in that case is that Sharon McIvor challenged the government—as it had a direct impact on children—through the court challenges program, and was successful. She was successful in the Supreme Court of British Columbia.

What's happened now is that the Government of Canada is challenging her in the Supreme Court of Canada, and she now doesn't have the resources of the court challenges program to fight her case in the Supreme Court. That's one concrete example I'm aware of that has a very significant impact on the lives of aboriginal women.

There may be more, and I think it's important that we be able to review it, and speak to it and recommend on it. Whether we are successful or not, I think it's important that it be part of the public record.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Minna, and Madame Thaï Thi Lac.

Hon. Maria Minna: I'll be very quick.

The only reason I raised it, again, is that it does have an impact on women. I think its impact is disproportionate between men in general, aboriginal women and women in general. There's violence against women in many areas. And it does tie in with our study on gender budgeting, because we're going to be looking at one of the examples of the legal system, which is really part of that. So that's why I thought of it. The legal system is broad, but this is a small, specific program that we might want to take a look at in terms of its impacts. That was my thinking.

The Chair: Madame Thaï Thi Lac.

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Good afternoon.

First, I would like to see the reports that have been prepared. Today, I am being asked to go on to something else, but I have not seen the reports. I would like to read them before I say anything.

Moreover, I think that even if this was debated in other committees, we must not forget that our approach will be much different from that of any other committee. Therefore I think that we could raise even more arguments. If we can help to reinstate the program, I would not like to miss the opportunity of bringing up more arguments to show how essential it is, even if other committees have already dealt with the issue.

[English]

The Chair: Committee members, should we get the copies of the reports that have been done by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights?

I just want to know, Madame Boucher, would you have been on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights? No? Oh, official languages. Okay. Because I just wanted to know if that Sharon McIvor case was ever studied. No? Okay.

If we could look at the reports that have been done by the Standing committees on Canadian Heritage, Justice and Human Rights, and Official Languages and then sieve out what is not relevant to us and say these issues are still relevant to us, and then make a decision, would that be agreeable to move forward?

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, I suggest that all the committees that have studied the Court Challenges Program—

•(1645)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I cannot say when.

A voice: The official languages committee had some.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Is that so? I was not aware of that. I did the

[*English*]

The Chair: Does anybody know when this study was completed?

The government would have responded by now for sure.

So we will look at the reports, and if there have been government responses we'll look at them and then we will determine how to move forward with the court challenges program from a woman's perspective.

Yes, Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: In terms of process, had the prorogation occurred, if the reports had been tabled with the House and a response was pending, would it be up to the new committees to resubmit, or would those responses be forthcoming anyway? In other words, prorogation doesn't affect—

A voice: It's the same session. It's not a new one.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Excellent. Okay, good.

The Chair: Any other business?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, I would also like to table the following motion: that after reading the reports and everything else, we study the Court Challenges Program.

We have to make motions to get things on the agenda. Therefore, I would like us to study this program and the impact that it had on women, especially on minority women.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. Have you got that?

The Clerk: It was agreed that after looking at reports from other standing committees, the committee will decide whether it wants to study the court challenges program, focused on women.

The Chair: No—“after having reviewed the programs”. Can I paraphrase what you said?

The Clerk: Normally I should get a real written motion, and I'm trying to—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Do we have to table a motion here if we want to have something on the agenda? Without a motion, will it not get on the agenda?

[*English*]

The Chair: So you are proposing that once the committee has reviewed the three reports, that we be able to look at the angle and see if it deals with the impact on women of the cancellation of the court challenges program?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: That we study the Court Challenges Program and the impact of its abolition on women's groups, more specifically minorities, which includes first nations women.

[*English*]

We want to do it. We don't want to talk about doing it; we want to do it.

The Clerk: You don't want to see if you want to do it. You want to look at reports and you're doing it no matter what.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Yes.

The Chair: But you will have a better understanding of it.

Ms. Mathysen, you had your hand up.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Yes, Madam Chair.

Two things. One thing, rather mundane, is I'm wondering about this room. It seems very small. I'm wondering if when we begin to have our witnesses we could have a better space and have a little breathing room.

The second thing is that I've been giving some thought with regard to when people come to give testimony about the estimates. And I would like to ask that staff from the regional offices come as part of that so that we can find out how they're managing after a year of closures, in terms of those twelve offices that were closed. Perhaps that could be part of our discussion when we look at the estimates and we ask about how the department is functioning.

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen, if I hear you correctly, afterwards, when we're doing a thorough analysis, we should get the regional office staffs to come?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Yes. I'd like to hear how they're managing.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Madam Chair, with the greatest of respect, I know the committee has the ability to compel other levels of staff members, but customarily committees really should be getting representation of the department from the senior levels of the department. If the committee is interested in understanding the dynamic of the regional delivery programs and so on, a higher level of the department should be able to report on that as well. We shouldn't be going on a fishing expedition here, particularly for those employees.

We have seen some of the feedback from previous such committee meetings, when more junior staff members are hauled before a standing committee of the House of Commons. This can be a very difficult experience. And really, unless there's a very specific and compelling reason, I believe the senior departmental people should be able to answer the questions to committee on behalf of the whole department.

•(1650)

The Chair: Any other comments?

Yes, Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: I simply wanted to know how many cases the regional offices were seeing. Is there a backlog? How are they managing? From where are the clients coming, and are they able to accommodate those clients? It was to have a better understanding of how the operation is working now.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any other business?

Yes, Mr. Stanton.

I had my gavel in my hand.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: I know. It was just about my colleague, Madam Demers. I think that is the correct way to pronounce Madam's name?

Ms. Nicole Demers: Yes.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: I've heard it differently. I think members should pronounce it correctly. It's Demers, *avec un "s"*?

Ms. Nicole Demers: Demers, yes.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: *C'est bon.* Excellent.

The Chair: I adjourn the committee meeting.

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