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—
Chair

Mr. Rob Merrifield

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• (1310)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.)): Good afternoon. We're going to get started.

The way it's going to work is we'll allow all the presenters five minutes for their opening statement, their opening brief, and then we'll have the members ask questions.

Some of the members are obviously missing. There are a few problems, and one of them is the weather, so that's why some of us are not dressed as we normally are dressed. Secondly, there was also some confusion with a bill that has also been referred to our committee. It's a budget bill, so there was lack of planning on the government's side on that one.

What we'll do is when we start the rounds with the questioning I'll explain to you how that works. We need to keep it to five minutes. I'll hold up my finger when you have a minute left in your presentation. If we can keep it on time, I'd appreciate it.

Anything you say is going to be recorded. There will be transcripts, so not to worry. Regular members of the committee will be looking at your briefs or at the transcript of the meeting. They will be made available on the Internet for anybody who wants to look them up later on.

We start with the order that I have here. I have l'Association des infirmières et infirmiers du Canada.

Mrs. Neufeld, go ahead. You have five minutes.

Ms. Kaaren Neufeld (President Elect, Canadian Nurses Association): My name is Kaaren Neufeld. I am the president-elect of the Canadian Nurses Association. The CNA represents some 129,000 registered nurses throughout the country. Thank you for this opportunity and for having my remarks tabled and appended as minutes.

The CNA believes that the tax system is a powerful tool, and given its importance, CNA recommends changes to the tax system to support the health of Canadians and a healthy economy, in order to sustain the claim made in the October 2007 Speech from the Throne.

In particular, CNA sees the opportunity to encourage actions to modernize health sector infrastructure and to promote innovation in health delivery. From CNA's perspective, a strong health sector has created a strong foundation for Canada's current economic prosperity. By comparison, take U.S.-based Starbucks, which spends more on health care insurance for its employees than it spends on the raw materials to make its coffee.

CNA's brief is organized around four areas for action. Taken together, they strengthen the economy, we believe, and improve timely access to quality health services. These four areas are information and communication technology, skill enhancement training, children's health, and obesity.

Today I will speak to the first two recommendations.

Information and communication technology offers solutions to issues of access to health services. ICT investment will bring the health sector into the 21st century and help make the health system competitive, effective, and efficient. Take, for example, the emergency department at the Scarborough general hospital, which is currently piloting self-serve kiosks, similar to those you see in airports, to register patients with minor ailments, so that the triage nurse is free to deal with critically ill patients.

We also know that two-thirds of deaths in Canada result from chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and mental illness. Canadians with chronic illness are supported by community-based services that occur in their home, in clinics, and in seniors' centres. We know that people with chronic illness do not get the follow-up tests and control that they need for their disease. An electronic system would allow health professionals like the 3,000 oncology nurses across Canada to assess and monitor progress and to generate electronic reminders for patient checkups.

Canadians who live outside urban centres are often required to travel great distances to get health services or to greet and meet specialists. Applications like Telehealth enable service provision 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in every urban, rural, and remote location throughout Canada.

Many of Alberta's 25,000 registered nurses work in rural settings. Community-based nurses throughout Canada use laptops to access test results and clinical guidelines. Providing a GST rebate to registered nurses or their employers for investing in laptop computers and cellphones would cost a mere \$96 per nurse. The investment would mean better access to services by reducing visits to emergency rooms and specialist physicians and by averting the need to fly from communities. Throughout the tax system the federal government can create a business environment that encourages efficiencies, so to promote the purchase of ICT tools, CNA recommends that corporations that invest in information and communication technology for the health system receive a 100% rebate of the goods and services tax charged on ICT purchases.

The second issue I would like to address is providing effective economic leadership by supporting skills enhancement training. The Speech from the Throne six weeks ago promised that the government would support Canadian researchers and innovators in developing new ideas and bringing them to the marketplace. CNA applauds this commitment, and we believe that enhancing the skills and knowledge of the workforce is a key element for delivering on this commitment. CNA recommends that the tax system be changed so that Canadian workers and their employees will be rewarded for investing in skills development by receiving a credit against their EI contribution.

Canada has a well-educated and highly skilled workforce. However, consider these facts:

The Conference Board of Canada reports that 42% of Canadians between the ages of 16 and 65 have literacy levels too low to allow them to be fully competent in most jobs within our economy. In 1996, employers invested \$842 per employee in training, while in 2006 they invested only \$699. CNA recommends that the tax system be changed to encourage investment in skills enhancement training. CNA sees the employment insurance program as a vehicle to achieve this. The purpose of Canada's employment insurance program is to maintain a stable workforce; the EI program currently has a multi-billion-dollar surplus. Employees and employers both pay payroll taxes for EI.

In conclusion, CNA notes that in the previous budget the government made positive steps to promote a healthy environment and a prosperous economy.

•(1315)

Given Canada's leadership role in today's knowledge-intensive global economy, CNA recommends tax changes that will enhance the productivity of all Canadians, in particular, the health sector and its employees.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): Thank you.

Next we have Ms. Jessen from the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, B.C. Chapter.

Mrs. Sabine Jessen (Conservation Director, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - B.C. Chapter): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. I'd like to thank you for this opportunity to present on behalf of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society.

We'd like to start by acknowledging the investments that were made in last year's budget to begin addressing conservation needs, in particular for protected areas in the Northwest Territories, species at risk, and for health of the oceans.

I'd like to tell you a little bit about the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. We are Canada's voice for wilderness. We were established in 1963 and we've been instrumental in protecting over 400,000 square kilometres of Canada's most treasured wild places. We operate from 13 chapters that cover nearly every province and territory and we have a strong base of support in our 20,000 supporters across Canada.

Nature is at the core of who we are as Canadians. Our spectacular land and seascapes and their natural riches have shaped our past and our current identity. How we treat Canada's lands and waters and the ecosystems they support will determine our future.

The need for decisive action to implement a conservation vision is more important than ever because of climate change. As the world gathers in Bali, Indonesia, to determine the actions needed on a global scale to combat climate change, we need to recognize that Canada will need to take action on both mitigation and adaptation fronts. There is a strong scientific consensus that human-caused climate change is already harming the health of the earth's ecosystems, which are our planet's life support system.

To ensure the survival of healthy ecosystems in this era of climate change, Canada needs to take immediate and decisive action to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. It's also extremely important that we act now to protect our remaining wilderness. Canada's wilderness is vital to Canadians and to the world as a source of clean air, clean water, and a vast carbon storage reservoir, as well as being a key factor in protecting biodiversity.

Canada needs to follow Australia's example by completing systems of protected areas on land and sea and ensuring that these are linked together as a network by encouraging compatible activities on working landscapes. The federal government needs to lead Canadian action towards this bold nature conservation vision.

Delivering on this vision in Canada will require strong collaboration among the federal government, provincial and territorial governments, first nations, private landholders, and other partners. The federal government has a critical role to play in delivering on conservation priorities within its own jurisdiction and providing leadership among all levels of government and other partners to implement Canada's commitment.

We've identified six key actions that the federal government should take to protect healthy ecosystems in the face of climate change. First of all, we need to include land, ocean, and freshwater wilderness conservation as part of a comprehensive climate change strategy. Second, we need to complete the national parks system and other forms of federal protected areas across Canada, and ensure their connectivity and long-term ecological integrity. The third key action is to protect large ecosystems in Canada's north in advance of industrial development. The fourth is to protect ocean and freshwater ecosystems through better planning and management of human activities. The fifth is to complete Canada's network of marine-protected areas, including national marine conservation areas and marine wildlife areas in all of our oceans and great freshwater lakes. And the sixth key action is to protect and restore habitat for species at risk.

I'm going to just focus on two of these, which are national parks and oceans, in this presentation.

Canada's national parks have been a source of great pride for Canadians for over 120 years. However, our parks system is not yet complete and our existing parks face growing threats to their ecological health.

There is an opportunity for this government to step in and complete the national parks system, an initiative that would be hugely popular with Canadians. However, a funding gap still exists to secure long-term protection for all of our national parks.

On the oceans front, the scientific evidence is conclusive. Globally, marine ecosystems are imperilled and scientists around the world have demonstrated the important benefits of establishing marine-protected areas to protect biodiversity, ensure the resilience of marine systems, and facilitate species' response to climate change.

I'd like to focus on the key financial implications of what we are suggesting and the investment that we believe is required.

• (1320)

We are also a member of the Green Budget Coalition. This is consistent with the recommendations we have developed as part of the coalition for an investment over five years of \$851 million, and \$212 million thereafter. This includes, on the oceans front, \$286 million over five years, with \$82 million per year thereafter; and for national parks and other federal protected areas, \$565 million over five years, with \$130 million per year thereafter.

This funding would produce enormous results in biodiversity conservation in Canada. It would result in 35 new marine protected areas, eight integrated oceans management plans, 11 new national parks, six completed national parks, more effective protection of these treasured ecosystems, and a revitalized system of national wildlife areas and migratory bird sanctuaries.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): Next, from the Partners for Rural Family Support Center, is Ms. Hyde.

Ms. Jo Ann Hyde (Executive Director, Partners for Rural Family Support Center): I'm Jo Ann Hyde, and I'm the executive director of Partners for Rural Family Support in east-central Saskatchewan. We are a non-profit charitable organization.

I'm going to talk today about the effects of domestic violence, our financial responsibility towards that.

Probably the greatest issue, the issue that is most widespread and most costly to society today is domestic violence. Its ripple effect is felt in our communities, economy, businesses, law, justice, health, education. It's pervasive.

We currently spend approximately \$4.2 billion annually on the fallout produced by domestic violence. That's an old figure, about three years old. I couldn't find one more current, so it's likely we spend more than that now.

We have safe houses in Canada, and when I think about that, when you think about safe houses, it doesn't make sense to me. Is that not like a refugee camp? Why do we have to have places that keep women and children safe? We have those because we are tolerant towards the continuation of violence. Instead of focusing on prevention and intervention, we're focusing on the fallout, on the crisis.

Domestic violence is pervasive in that it knows no income restrictions and it is across all ages, all religions, all cultures, the geography of Canada. Domestic violence is everywhere. It is true, however, that some conditions allow it to flourish, for instance, isolation. And we know that to be true because all we have to do is listen to what is happening in our Northwest Territories or Nunavik, or unfortunately, in my own home province of Saskatchewan.

For Saskatchewan women, isolation is a way of life, and I see that daily in my agency. My agency is located in a very small, tiny city of 5,000 people in central Saskatchewan, and we offer services to a surrounding district of a 100 kilometre radius. Of course those lines are quite loosely defined. If someone calls me from 250 kilometres away and she is isolated and she is in danger, I'm going to help her. She obviously doesn't have the kind of help she needs right there.

This agency works in terms of prevention, education, and information. Four days ago I had an incident happen in my agency that with the help of the police we managed to dissipate; we managed to control the situation. If we had not been there, quite likely the amount of money that would have been spent for the woman in the hospital in intensive care, for justice to become involved, for foster care to become involved, for welfare to become involved, would have been between \$200,000 and \$1 million, just for that one family unit, just for that one incident that happened last week. Instead it cost three hours of my time, an hour of the RCMP's time, and a wee bit of overhead.

Funding is the most difficult thing for us to garner, and I don't know why. We operate 80% on grants. Grants are criteria-specific, so while they are wonderful to get, it means that we have to gear it specifically towards, say, cyber-safety.

I've never yet read on a grant where it says, "And oh, by the way, feel free to use some of this money towards your rent or your utilities or your wages."

•(1325)

I am going to have to close my doors. December, somewhere around Christmas, I'm out of money. My next grant comes February 1, and I can't find any federal, provincial, municipal, or urban government that will say to me, "Here is \$10,000 to pay for your bills." Yet last week I saved all levels of government between \$200,000 and \$1 million.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): From RESULTS Canada, Mr. Salmon.

Mr. Blaise Salmon (President, RESULTS Canada): Good afternoon. I'm Blaise Salmon. I'm president of RESULTS Canada. RESULTS is a citizens' advocacy group with chapters across Canada, and we work to generate the political will to end the worst aspects of hunger and extreme global poverty.

We are members of both the Canadian Council for International Co-operation and the Make Poverty History campaign, with the support of more than a quarter million Canadians.

Extreme global poverty has a negative impact on global security, on public health, on the environment and on the economy. The reality is that 1.2 billion people around the world live in extreme poverty, attempting to survive on less than \$1 a day.

Globalization has been good for Canada. Our economy is among the strongest in the world according to the OECD, and global trade has been a key driver of our economic strength. The value of trade as a percentage of GDP in 2005 was 60%. However, global poverty and instability can have serious implications for our economic outlook.

The millennium development goals are the global blueprint designed to focus international effort to fight extreme poverty. These goals, agreed to by most nations of the world, including Canada, have set practical, achievable measures intended to cut extreme poverty in half by the year 2015, but in order to achieve these goals the world's rich nations need to provide approximately 0.5% of GNI in aid. To go a step further than that and eliminate extreme poverty altogether, estimated aid of 0.7% is required.

Currently, Canada's foreign aid is about 0.3% of gross national income, so during the last election Prime Minister Harper promised to bring Canada's aid up to at least the average of other donor countries—which is currently about 0.46%. Instead, Canada's aid has actually dropped, from 0.34% in 2005 to 0.30% in 2006.

All these figures are from the OECD, by the way.

Despite the continued large budget surpluses, there is no sign that Canada's moving even toward the average level of generosity promised by Mr. Harper. Clearly, we must do more.

What would it cost? Annual increases of about \$650 million, less than 5% of the \$14 billion surplus—which is projected to be even higher next year—or a fraction of 1% of the overall federal budget, less than one-half of 1%.

In addition to the issue of the quantity of aid, we have the quality of aid. Canada must provide better aid. We support the initiative of Mr. McKay's Bill C-293, the proposed Development Assistance

Accountability Act. This would bring Canada closer to better poverty-focused international aid. However, it is currently stalled in the Senate. For Canada's aid to improve, it is vital that this bill become law.

My main point, however, is that it doesn't really make sense to wait until all possible reforms to CIDA are completed before increasing Canada's aid. There are many good examples of cost-effective multilateral aid vehicles that Canada should be supporting right now. Many of these are quite separate from CIDA. These include the global fund to fight AIDS, TB, and malaria; the global TB drug facility; Canada's international immunization initiative; the fast track initiative for basic education; UNICEF's micro nutrient and nutrition initiatives; and the global TB drug facility, as well as the new global sanitation fund.

All these vehicles have track records of success and established transparency and accountability mechanisms. All that is missing is a fair share of level of funding from donors such as Canada.

In fact, Prime Minister Harper provided a good example last week in Tanzania, when he announced the \$105 million initiative over five years to save a million lives. This partnership with UNICEF, the Gates Foundation, and other donors will deliver basic health services, such as immunization, bed nets, antibiotics, micro nutrients, and other measures for women and children in countries where the needs are greatest. It is a very worthwhile program.

However, I think the media coverage had it right. The Canadian Press headline said "Harper pledges more money to Africa but admits Canada's foreign aid declining". Canada's initiative to save a million lives is quality aid with a good start, but it ultimately will not reach its potential, simply because it doesn't receive enough funding.

The remedy is a simple one. Canada must reach at least the average level of aid given by other countries, as promised by Prime Minister Harper in the last election.

Thank you.

•(1330)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): Thank you.

From the Women Elders in Action, Ms. Westlund.

Ms. Jan Westlund (Coordinator, Women Elders in Action): Thank you.

My name is Jan Westlund. I'm coordinator of Women Elders in Action.

WEACT, which is an acronym for the organization, is a provincial network concerned about economic security for unattached senior women, as most will be at some point in their lives. We've focused on the pension position of already retired women in our research.

We've also developed an understanding of the financial retirement readiness of women in the labour force today.

We've drawn heavily on current research from StatsCanada regarding women's average annual earnings, their prevalence in non-standard work, their overburden of society's caregiving duties, their lack of occupational pensions, and their inability to contribute significantly to RRSPs.

We see that many will be disadvantaged when the majority of retirement income depends on an individual's lifetime earnings and savings.

In 2004, 40% of employed women held non-standard jobs, commonly offering no benefits and low wages in Canada. These days it is being suggested that they need to work until 67, or even 73, to achieve some semblance of economic security. This warning fits with the government's desire to have aging workers stay in the workforce longer to increase productivity.

The calls to keep people working longer have been enabled by a movement to eliminate mandatory retirement where it exists. Inevitably, we also hear from those who want Canada to increase pension age or to eliminate access to an early Canada Pension Plan. These would be harsh developments for many employed women. A delayed pension age is an unreasonable imposition on those with low-paying work and little chance to contribute to RRSPs. Extending work life will do little to improve their financial situation when they do retire.

This is the scenario that exists as you posed the question regarding the targeting of taxes. Our members have noted a considerable reduction in the tax rate of corporations over the years. However, corporate investments in buildings, machines, equipment, research and development, skill-building, which would lead to higher productivity, have lagged.

Profits are being invested outside the country in record amounts, placed in offshore tax shelters, or paid out to corporate insiders and shareholders. In short, we are rewarding corporations for not improving our lagging productivity.

According to David Dodge, the Bank of Canada governor, in June 2007:

Canada's disappointing productivity record is attributable to industry not taking full advantage of new information and communications technologies, and insufficient investments in equipment, research and technology and worker training.

WEACT would like the finance committee to focus on corporations as the most important source of productivity improvements. This is preferable to fretting Canadian women with part-time work or low-paying service sector jobs with the notion that they must work until they drop.

We need government leadership in strengthening corporate tax policy at a minimum, to require more reinvestments in this country with the goal of increasing productivity.

We would also like to suggest that you use personal taxation policy to diminish our inequalities. The government's use of tax policy should be designed to benefit those who need assistance the most. Many seniors qualify for this consideration. They are at the

stage of life when they are least able to improve things for themselves.

We believe pension income-splitting denies the government revenue, while it ignores the needs of unattached women at greatest risk for poverty. We recommend a revised program that could be more equitably applied to low-income couples and the unattached alike.

The corporate profits that make their way to shareholders here are often enjoyed by individuals through their RRSP portfolios and through occupational pensions. The combined projected net tax expenditure for those Canadians able to contribute to these private plans for 2007 is more than \$21 billion. This is an enormous figure when one considers that three out of ten Canadian families possess neither of these pension assets.

In 2005 WEACT published *Pensions in Canada: Policy Reform Because Women Matter*. It offered 23 recommendations to improve the pension position of women. To date, 40 organizations across the country have endorsed our call for change.

● (1335)

Our recommendations dealing specifically with personal taxation from that paper are relevant to today's subject. We suggest the elimination of taxation on income below the low-income cut-off, and we also suggest converting deductions for RRSP and RPP savings to credits. This would make the reward for contributions more equitable between those in higher and lower tax brackets.

This last recommendation has generated considerable discussion, as you can well imagine. Today we are willing to consider an alternative recently put forward by Monica Townson, in her brief for the Canadian Association of Social Workers, entitled "Financial Security for Women Seniors in Canada". She recommends that the ceiling on RRSP contributions be reduced and that the resulting savings in tax expenditures be redirected to improved old age security and GIS benefits for low-income individuals. This would reflect the finding that RRSPs are of most interest to higher-income Canadians, who are in the least need.

One final point. For the last several years we've discussed economic issues with senior women all over the province. We hear that it's increasingly difficult for them to find affordable housing in their own communities. Some are now paying between 50% and 60% of their limited income for shelter. Their plight is only one facet of a severe housing crisis facing many middle- and lower-income Canadians today.

The government appears incapable of augmenting the guaranteed income supplement sufficiently to keep up with skyrocketing market housing costs. We would like to strongly suggest that the tax surpluses be assigned to begin funding a substantive national housing strategy that would benefit the poor of all ages.

That's it.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): Thank you.

We're going to a round of questions. The members have five minutes to ask questions and for you to reply; it's all-inclusive, for the same price.

I'm going to go directly to Monsieur St-Cyr.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, everyone.

First I'm going to speak to Ms. Westlund.

I'm very sensitive to all the issues concerning assistance for seniors and fairness within the various classes of society. However, I don't think the recommendation that RRSP and RPP deductions be converted to tax credits is a good path to take. In the case of RRSPs, what is called a tax credit is not a tax exemption, but a tax deferred. As a result, when people claim a tax refund, those who have larger incomes receive more than individuals in the less well-to-do classes. On the other hand, when they retire, when they withdraw the money from their RRSPs, these people obviously pay more tax than those who have invested less in their RRSPs.

I think this deferred tax system should be preserved. However, other measures are of much greater concern to me, among other things the fact that the Guaranteed Income Supplement is not fully reimbursed to seniors on a retroactive basis. That seems to me to represent much larger amounts. The program that you're proposing would not constitute a saving: it would simply amount to deferred taxes.

However, in the case of the Guaranteed Income Supplement, this is net money that the victims of this problem still don't have and that is owed to them. If a person has owed the government money for five years because he or she has failed to pay taxes, the government will inform that person of the fact and go back. However, if the government owes a senior the equivalent of five years of the Guaranteed Income Supplement, that person is only given the equivalent of 11 months of benefits.

Were you aware of that? Does that issue concern you as a group?

• (1340)

[English]

Ms. Jan Westlund: Yes, that could certainly be improved.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: All right.

[English]

Ms. Jan Westlund: Was there a question in there?

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Yes, I'd like to know whether this situation concerns you.

[English]

Ms. Jan Westlund: Yes, it could be improved.

But can I draw your attention back to the comments you made regarding the fact that income tax deductions would be deferred and paid at a later time? That directly refers to our suggestion that pension income splitting is not as great as a lot of people seem to think it is. In our minds, what we see is that people who are getting those tax deductions on their RRSPs right off the bat will again be allowed to benefit when it comes to paying the tax on those, because they will split their income—supposedly with a spouse of less income—and that way, they've received a deduction upfront and get it again at the end.

We see that as a real problem; we don't think it's fair. It certainly benefits people with enough wealth to stockpile money in RRSPs, and we know they are the top earners. Something like 76% of people who have incomes of \$80,000 can afford to put money into their RRSPs, and are doing so with great alacrity. But poor people are not doing that; people whose incomes are \$25,000 or \$30,000 are not doing that. They have hundreds of thousands of dollars of room in their RRSPs and cannot do that.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: I agree with you that the issue of retirement income splitting is a problem with regard to fairness. But this is another problem. I don't think that we're going to solve matters by changing the way RRSPs operate. To my knowledge, these aren't subject to income splitting. Only registered pension plans are.

• (1345)

[English]

Ms. Jan Westlund: No, no, no, it's RRSPs and occupational pensions, not old age pensions, nor the guaranteed income supplement, nor the Canada Pension Plan. So it's obviously the income of people who have had enough money to put it away in the first place.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): Thierry, we're going to come back to this.

Ms. Savoie.

[English]

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Thank you for your presentations.

I'll start with you, Ms. Neufeld.

You touched on a subject that is particularly interesting to me, because of an employability study we are doing in Ottawa on an all-party committee looking at that. You talked about skills enhancement training and suggested that it would be useful to give employers an incentive to invest in skills development, and that somehow the contribution should be tied to their EI contribution.

I just wondered if you would elaborate on that and explain to me what that would entail.

Ms. Kaaren Neufeld: Sure, we are recommending that employers and employees who invest in skills development receive a credit against their employment insurance contributions.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Employers and employees?

Ms. Kaaren Neufeld: Yes, both.

That way, depending on who takes the initiative to invest, we think you would have employees investing in their own skills enhancement and you would have the employer investing.

We are noticing—as I believe I heard from one of the other presenters, as well—a reduction in the amounts employers are investing in skills enhancement.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Absolutely.

Ms. Kaaren Neufeld: And it is critical, we believe, that it be reversed, because knowledge—particularly in the health sector—is something that requires continual learning. We will always need investment in that, and we are seeing that it is one of the things that our counterparts in the United States see as a way of attracting health workers to move south, because they are willing to invest in skills enhancement.

Ms. Denise Savoie: No, absolutely, and you're quite right there has been a reduction in investment in skills training by the private sector, and it's an area of concern. But I'm not quite sure how that would work. So I would pay into EI, and it would come up on my pay slip, and would that money then be credited back to me? Is that what you're suggesting?

Ms. Kaaren Neufeld: We are suggesting you would get a credit, so that you would not have to pay the full amount on your EI contribution.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Thank you very much.

I have a question to Ms. Jessen. You talked about the need to complete our national parks system. There's been a suggestion by the government in the last year about creating a national trust. I assume it hasn't been fleshed out more than that. It was an idea that was thrown out. Would you see that as helpful, to have a national body that would be actively working on ensuring that significant ecosystems across Canada are protected as a national trust? I believe there's one in Britain.

Mrs. Sabine Jessen: I have to admit I wasn't aware of that proposal. I guess I would have to say that anything that would help speed up our progress on protecting lands and waters in Canada would be welcome. I'd need to know more details about that trust idea, what that would look like.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Right. I don't think many details were given. Perhaps Mr. Baird thought of that the night before. It seemed to me an idea worth considering. It's unfortunate it hasn't been fleshed out more.

Mrs. Sabine Jessen: I'm sure our organization would be very happy to discuss that further and look at how to best structure something like that, so that it would be the most effective organization possible.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Thank you.

Do I have a minute?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): You have one minute.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Okay. This is a quick question on foreign aid, overseas development aid.

Recently our Prime Minister said that it would be difficult, I think was his word, to meet our commitment of 0.7% GDP because our economy was increasing so fast. Isn't that like saying to the rest of the world, "Well, as we're getting richer, we're going to share less"? I wondered if you'd heard that comment and what you thought of that.

Mr. Blaise Salmon: Yes, I've heard that.

We actually write a lot of letters to the editor, and that makes for a good one, because you can say the reason we're not giving as much is we're getting so rich, basically.

• (1350)

Ms. Denise Savoie: Yes, it was a perplexing comment.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): Thank you, Madam Savoie.

Mr. Dykstra, for five minutes.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I want to pursue, Kaaren, a couple of things that were in the 2007 budget and wonder if you had an opportunity to know about them and comment on them, on their success or if they've maybe started yet this year. One was the close to \$9 million as part of the health care transition fund to develop the foundation of a shared understanding of nurse practitioners' roles and facilitate sustained integration into the primary health care services.

Ms. Kaaren Neufeld: I am familiar with it, and we're very grateful for being able to participate in that program.

We do see the number of nurse practitioners increasing across the country and we see that as a very important step in diversifying the health care team and ensuring that people have access to primary health care within their communities where they work and live. It's an initiative, I think, that has really moved along nurse practitioner education and coordination across this country. It's been very helpful.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Have you noticed which parts of the country have actually picked up on it more than others, or is it more based on need?

Ms. Kaaren Neufeld: More based on need? Actually, I hear about nurse practitioners moving into practice across this country, from coast to coast to coast. Obviously northern Canada has utilized nurse practitioners for a much longer time, but I am hearing and seeing clinics developing across the country. It's a change in collaborative practice, and it is taking some discussion with our colleagues as to what that role is and how it will benefit them as well as a community, but I do believe it is progressing well.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: All right. The other thing was an initiative that started this year, the NurseONE portal. The amount of money is based on a five-year strategy, but it is starting in 2007-08. I wondered if you wouldn't mind commenting on that as well.

Ms. Kaaren Neufeld: The nursing portal is something that I think will support our recommendation, in terms of information and communication technology. It is one way we will be able to ensure that nurses across this country have access to best-practice guidelines, to trusted sources of information that they need in order to do practice every day.

It is just getting off the ground, and I know that it is something that FNIHB, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, is very supportive of, because the federal government is a large employer of nurses. Their nurses are often in more remote and rural locations and the portal will be of great help to them, in terms of being able to access a trusted, credible resource.

It will also help nurses in the country to join with colleagues in setting up collaboratives of practice, where not only will we be able to access but we will be able to generate new knowledge. That is a really important key, I think, in moving forward. It is the generation of new knowledge, which is an important part of nurses' work, which the portal will facilitate.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: I am going to pursue a little bit broader questions and comments.

One of the things in the 2007 budget was the switch, if you will. This relates directly to equalization and the payments that the federal government makes to each of the provinces. While we all have our views on that from a political perspective, one of the comments I've seen across the board is that our health care dollars are now being funded on a per capita basis to the provinces. For example, in Ontario, for the first time in the history of equalization payments in the country, they actually have per capita funding regarding health care. I wondered if that was something you had studied as an organization, or had looked at or had any comments on.

Ms. Kaaren Neufeld: It's not something I would have a comment on right now, but I certainly can take it back to the association.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Okay, thanks a lot.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): Thank you.

I have a quick question, and then I'll go to another round, and I'll come up at the end.

Ms. Hyde, your lack of funding is a bit troubling. Where does your organization get its funding now?

Ms. Jo Ann Hyde: Eighty percent comes from grants. We get \$20,000 from the provincial Department of Social Services and \$8,000 from the Department of Health.

• (1355)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): Is that provincial or federal?

Ms. Jo Ann Hyde: That's provincial.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): So there's no federal funding? You don't get any federal funding as it is?

Ms. Jo Ann Hyde: Zero.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): I think Corrections Canada has prevention, and I think Justice Canada also has some prevention programs. Have you applied there?

Ms. Jo Ann Hyde: Yes, we have.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): You don't get any funding there?

Ms. Jo Ann Hyde: We have had no response, which is unusual. I find that very difficult to understand. I'm working with a parent group right now, which is court-ordered, and yet I don't get any funding from the Department of Justice at all.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): How about community, in terms of getting your locale funded or anything like that? That's something that happens in my riding. I'm in an urban riding, though.

Ms. Jo Ann Hyde: Do you mean municipalities and fundraising?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): No, I mean the municipality providing you with an office and some of the overhead that you require to run your organization.

Ms. Jo Ann Hyde: I approached the mayor probably about two weeks ago, and they don't want to set a precedent.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): What municipality are you in?

Ms. Jo Ann Hyde: We are in the Humboldt area in central Saskatchewan.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): That's just outside of Saskatoon?

Ms. Jo Ann Hyde: It's about 100 kilometres to the east of Saskatoon.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): How about in terms of salaries through the Department of Human Resources? Would that not be a department as well to look to for financing?

Ms. Jo Ann Hyde: The only people who've engaged in a conversation with me regarding that are from the Department of Social Services, and they are trying right now—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): Social Services would be provincial. We're at the federal level here, so I'm just wondering if federally—

Ms. Jo Ann Hyde: No, there's nothing federally.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): Have you tried Human Resources Canada? Is it Employment Canada? I'm not even sure what it's called.

Ms. Jo Ann Hyde: I would have to go back and check. The other problem with non-profit, when there's limited funding, is the incredible turnover of staff. I have been there a total of three months. I am the third executive director for this year, so I would have to go back and check the files on that.

I did go through everything before I came here today. I cannot find evidence of any successful funding—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): I'm not saying it's easy, but I look at my situation. I represent an urban riding that is two former municipalities on the Island of Montreal. One is very advanced when it comes to social programs, and they're able to get funding from all levels of government, whereas another part of my riding still doesn't even know that there are three levels of government sometimes.

It's a job you have to do as well through maybe your member of Parliament or your MPP and your city council as well. If I can offer some advice, perhaps look at those avenues.

I'm going to go back to the members.

Monsieur St-Cyr.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: My question is for Mr. Salmon.

I'm very much concerned by the issue of international development aid and by our target of 0.7%. The first reason why we offer this aid is obviously altruism, charity, the desire to help human beings in trouble elsewhere in the world. However, a nation as rich as Canada finds other benefits in taking part in international development.

Many people say that, by helping people emerge from poverty, we create global wealth and help improve the economy. Others say that investing in international development is also a way of fighting international conflicts and terrorism. We invest a lot of money in the fight against terrorism and a number of people suggest that it would perhaps be more efficient to invest more in international development aid.

Do you support that kind of idea, Mr. Salmon?

• (1400)

[English]

Mr. Blaise Salmon: Yes, I agree with the other benefits to aid. Just on the terrorism one, though, I'm a little cautious, in that sometimes aid can be diverted from more direct poverty reduction efforts to terrorism. In fact, the bill I mentioned that's now in the Senate, the better aid bill, I understand is in part designed so that Canada's aid is poverty-focused as much as possible and not diverted into perhaps more national defence issues or security issues. But yes, the environment, the economy, and stability as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: The important thing is therefore to invest in the fight against poverty, assuming that it will eventually have an impact on war and terrorism, in particular, not the reverse.

[English]

Mr. Blaise Salmon: I would say for our aid budget that would be more appropriate, to focus on poverty reduction.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: You propose, as a second measure, that we increase support for microcredit. Could you give us a concrete example of what that represents in terms of development aid?

[English]

Mr. Blaise Salmon: You mean how much of Canada's aid is for micro-credit or—?

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: You're talking about increasing it from \$29.9 million to \$78 million, I believe, that is to the level where it used to be. In concrete terms, in the field, how does microcredit contribute to international development?

[English]

Mr. Blaise Salmon: Micro-credit is one of the big success stories in poverty reduction really. Bangladesh is probably the most famous example with the Grameen Bank, which has now grown. It's lending out about \$7 billion in total now. Millions of borrowers have benefited, and longer-term studies show they actually cross the poverty line in something like 60% of the cases simply through borrowing for their own little businesses and the benefits flowing through to their families. The nice part, of course, about micro-credit is that in the end it's not charity. The Grameen Bank doesn't now take any donor money. Canada used to support it years ago, as it did other donors, but now it's just self-sustaining from the savings of its own borrowers.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: The rate of repayment by users is very high. So we can assume that the amounts you are requesting are intended to increase available capital.

[English]

Mr. Blaise Salmon: Yes, it's more the start-up funds for the many thousands of other micro-credit organizations that are at an earlier stage; it's seed capital and technical assistance to help things go.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): Ms. Savoie.

[English]

Thank you, Monsieur St-Cyr.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Ms. Hyde, I'll go back to the question of funding. I understand you've explored a lot of sources. The Minister responsible for Status of Women has repeatedly said in the House that the funding for women would not be cut and would simply go more to programs on the ground, programs such as the one you're talking about, from the sound of it.

I would think it would be very useful either to speak to your MP or to write directly to the minister responsible and raise the issue, because those programs, according to the minister's own words—and it's been repeated often enough—would not be cut and would go on the ground to women and children who need them. That would be my recommendation.

I'd like to go back to Ms. Westlund. I've heard it said that women earn, on average, 71% of what men earn, so it seems logical that when they come to retirement age, they suffer more hardship and are in greater poverty. I think Statistics Canada demonstrates that. Perhaps we should start paying 71% of our taxes and 71% of our rent and 71% of our medical.

What I wanted to ask you goes back to Monsieur St-Cyr's question. Instead of dealing with the whole issue of RRSPs...I understand what you're saying; I think the system is unfairly tilted to the wealthier, especially with the *fractionnement*, the income splitting, that is happening. However, we've long advocated that the whole safety net for seniors has to be reviewed on a yearly basis, projecting ten years ahead so that we're not in the situation Canada's now in with the GIS—it's not keeping up, and it's not even retroactive more than eleven months. Even the CPP that some people have paid in doesn't have the retroactivity it should have.

I'm wondering if you support that need to review our system and to have a seniors ombudsman who would really respond to Parliament and make recommendations to really ensure that seniors are not living in poverty in Canada.

● (1405)

Ms. Jan Westlund: Well, absolutely; there's obviously a great need for that low-income sector, and it's sizable.

I know there is a new federal council for seniors. We submitted extensive documentation to them about six months ago when they were newly formed, explaining our concerns and inviting dialogue. We have not heard from them since. I'm not sure what they're doing, but there is a council concerning itself with seniors' issues.

Our position paper had 23 recommendations. They were ways we thought the public pension system could be tweaked to help low-income people, especially women, benefit over time. We've been talking about those measures for the last three years. We'd certainly like to see change; we think there's lots of room for improvement, obviously.

Our latest work has told us that working women today are actually not going to be hugely better off than their mothers are. There are a lot of reasons right in here that make that pretty clear. As long as there's no child care that women can count on in this country, and as long as there's not pay equity, and as long as women do more than their fair share of caregiving, they will be behind and they will stay behind—and that's all there is to it.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): You have 30 seconds if you want them.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Thank you very much.

I'll be generous. I'll give him 30 seconds.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: I'm going to use it for a very good reason.

Jo Ann, from what you see around the table, and from the questions that you've been asked by all members of all four parties in the House, it's clear that we want to try to show some assistance. I think we did make a significant change to the way we deliver the service with respect to Status of Women Canada. One of the benefits for you in that regard is that we've assigned more money in the 2007 budget specifically for delivering programs.

You've been on the job for three months. I don't even know if you know where the application forms are to do this, and I'm going to say right away that it's not something you're going to get results from in the next 15 to 30 days. It's going to take a little while to work through the application. But if you do know who the member of

Parliament is where the facility is, I would be more than happy to put you in contact with that person. Certainly if you are looking to find out where the application forms are, we can chat for a bit after our meeting today, because it sounds to me like you've got an issue for which, while I don't want to say fits in perfectly with the status of women funding application format, it sounds to me like you'd be awfully close. I think you may actually get some help today that you may have been unaware of. So if you take a few minutes afterwards, I'd be happy to assist you with that.

Mr. Salmon, I did want to ask you a couple of things. You made a couple of good points. Sometimes we as Canadians have a tendency of beating ourselves up rather than patting ourselves on the back. Maybe something your organization wants to consider in terms of the approach that you take with the government is to make sure that....

There are some very positive things that are happening. When you talk about the small businesses that women are starting in Afghanistan and the loans that we're providing there, 97% to 99% of those businesses are successful. They're providing food for their families. They're becoming independent. They're not being dependent on government handouts or other countries participating. It's them actually being successful. I think it's one of the most successful programs we actually run abroad. When any of the government members or members of the ministry have gone, it's one of the most incredible things to see how successful these women have become and how dedicated they are to returning and paying back the loans they received for the micro-businesses that they run.

So I do think there are some positive things. We certainly increased funding in the 2007 budget, from 2006. I can roll out the numbers, but they're bigger numbers than any of us have in the bank, so I won't.

There is a commitment from this government to make sure that by the time we reach 2010 we'll have doubled our efforts from 2001 and 2002. We're going to stay focused on that. Ms. Oda made an announcement just today, another announcement with respect to funding overseas funding. It is a commitment of this government. And I hope you recognize that although nothing, when it comes to funding, ever goes quickly enough when you're dealing with any order of government, it is certainly a focus of this government to try to make sure that we have our place and a strong role internationally in terms of supporting other countries that need our help.

● (1410)

Mr. Blaise Salmon: Yes, I agree.

And we do, whenever possible. As I said with the Prime Minister last week, we really applaud that initiative. Often it's a step in the right direction, but it's not far enough. As I mentioned, our actual aid as a percentage is declining, so we could be doing a lot more of the good stuff, like Afghanistan.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Thanks. That's more of a general comment than anything else, but it's helpful.

Ms. Westlund, you got into some pretty specific issues as to how we can address single women who obviously have to deal with this. Then you mentioned child care twice as to reasons why women will never catch up. I wondered if you could comment a little more on that, the issues that single women face in terms of bringing up children.

Ms. Jan Westlund: I really can't, and I'll tell you why.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: One thing I forgot to say is that when we think of single women who are older and have been in the workforce, we don't always think of them as having children. We think of them as being single and on their own.

Ms. Jan Westlund: Okay.

I just know that women for eons, if they've been responsible for the care of children, have not been in the workforce to the same extent that they could have been.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: I guess in a large percentage of time, those women are married. They've got a husband or a spouse who is working. You say you didn't like the pension-splitting issue, but isn't that a perfect example of how, at least in terms of the care given by women who do choose to stay at home and bring up their children, there are obviously other benefits in that for the children and for the family? But I just wonder... Obviously pension-splitting, for those couples who determine that only one of them is going to work outside of the home, is a significant benefit for them as they get older.

Ms. Jan Westlund: Yes, that would probably help them to a degree. What we're finding, of course, and I think it reflects what is found by many people across Canada, is that it takes two workers to support a family these days, so it's very difficult for that kind of... What we see as almost an elitist position is where there can be only one wage earner in a family and one person staying at home. It is almost a luxury these days, being able to raise your own children. You don't see that happening so much.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Okay, thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): Thank you, Mr. Dykstra.

I have a couple of quick questions, Ms. Neufeld.

I know you addressed it in your brief, but some new technology that's going on in your sector, is that helping? I think of Infowave. I know that as members of Parliament we get a lot of regular updates, but they're huge documents, and I'll be honest, I can't go through all of them. What is the feedback on them? We invest a lot of money in them.

Ms. Kaaren Neufeld: The feedback on Infowave.... We do know there was a recent investment in Infowave, for which we are very grateful. We need more. I'm sure you hear that. It's because we do need to set up an architecture for communications and information infrastructure across the country.

• (1415)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): I know it's needed, but I'm saying from a practical point of view, do you know of any problems that have come about?

Ms. Kaaren Neufeld: I would say practically, no problems, simply that it's not moving fast enough. We seem to be having great

difficulty moving information and communication technology into the health sector.

It boggles our minds at times, why it seems to be so difficult to move that into a sector where, if we were able to improve access, that is one of the things that would make the productivity and the efficiency of our sector work so much better.

It is difficult for a family physician to have access to information when his patient is admitted to a hospital in this country. Once you have fragmentation of care like that, it's hard to have the kind of coordinated system that we need. But we are supportive of—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): So it's not fast enough. That's the answer I'm looking for, to be brief. Thank you.

Ms. Jessen, how do we reconcile this climate change versus preservation? Obviously, marine life, water, wilderness, ocean, marine, all of this is being affected by climate change. It's not a secret. But investing money trying to preserve our wilderness and water and things like that, will it really help? It's a natural phenomenon. Are we fighting climate change, or what will the investment do in trying to preserve our environment?

Mrs. Sabine Jessen: What the scientists are saying is that ecosystems that are more intact and have what they would call more resilience can actually better withstand the impacts of climate change.

As well, if you have networks of protected areas and you have connected the protected areas across the landscape by doing things like that, you provide for some mobility among the species that are being affected by climate change, so there are places where they can still go.

The other aspect of climate change on the terrestrial side is that our forests store a huge amount of carbon. By keeping that carbon there in the forests, that is actually a mitigation aspect. So there's the adaptation side—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): So to control the habitat a little bit better.

Mrs. Sabine Jessen: Yes.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): What I'm envisioning is what happens if the north begins to be affected, what do we do with our polar bears? If we bring them down south, that's kind of tough. Do we bring them farther up north?

Mrs. Sabine Jessen: It's not going to save every species, and it's going to depend then on how far climate change goes and how severe the impacts are we face. We're not going to save all the species. I too am worried that maybe that one is not going to make it unless we do something soon.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): Thank you.

Mr. Salmon, you spoke about Bill C-293. My colleague, Mr. McKay, is the sponsor of the bill. I assume you're in favour of it, but have you heard why it hasn't been moving more quickly?

Mr. Blaise Salmon: Yes, there's been some discussion. It seems that actually all parties are basically in favour, but it may be more of a partisan thing. It did almost make it through the Senate once, then when the throne speech started, they had to start again. Now it's....

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): But you haven't heard anything other than what we've heard.

Quickly, and this may be more a philosophical question, how do you reconcile your request for international aid and increasing the aid or specific aid for international purposes when you have somebody sitting to your right who has some domestic issues or national issues? How do we reconcile that?

Mr. Blaise Salmon: I think with the surplus, which will be close to \$20 billion, there's enough to go around.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): That's the rumour.

Mr. Blaise Salmon: Certainly the bulk of it will stay in Canada.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): There should be enough money to go around.

Mr. Blaise Salmon: Yes.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti): On that note, I want to thank all the witnesses. This is our last panel in the city of Victoria. Thank you for hosting us. We look forward to meeting you in the future.

The meeting is adjourned.

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