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—
Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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• (1540)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP)): I call the meeting to order.

I'd like to welcome Ms. Ducharme and Ms. Marquis from the Public Service Alliance of Canada.

Unfortunately, the witness who was coming to present for the Canadian Office and Professional Employees Union is unwell. We have that brief.

I'd invite our guests to please present. You have ten minutes each, and then we'll go into a round of questions.

Ms. Patty Ducharme (National Executive Vice-President, Executive Office, Public Service Alliance of Canada): Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to begin by stating that the Public Service Alliance of Canada stands strongly behind the Canadian Labour Congress's campaign for retirement security for everyone. This campaign calls for increased CPP benefits and public pensions for poor seniors and for a system of pension insurance. These demands will help women in particular to increase their pension security and get the dignified treatment they deserve. We agree that increased benefits will ensure that no retiree, current or future, gets left behind.

For federal public service workers, however, the Public Service Pension Plan, or PSPP, is known as one of the three pillars of the Canadian retirement income system. The first of the other two pillars are the Canada and the Quebec Pension Plans, CPP and QPP, and the other pillar is Old Age Security, or OAS. It is also recognized that it is a combination of the three that ensures adequate income in retirement. Our brief today focuses on the Public Service Pension Plan.

In the best-case scenario, the PSPP ensures that the total retirement income paid to a federal public service worker from these three sources represents 70% of the average salary he or she earned during the last five years prior to retirement. While we will go into detail in our written brief, our presentation will provide highlights on socio-demographic data on the members of the PSAC, review the main characteristics of the Public Service Pension Plan, and describe how the pension income of the federal public service constitutes deferred wages.

Our members make up the overwhelming majority of program administrators and front-line service providers for the Canadian public. About 64% of our members are women.

A survey of Public Service Alliance of Canada members working full-time for the federal government and its agencies was conducted across Canada in 2006 by Environics Research Group. According to the results, approximately 25% of the establishment reported that they intended to retire within the next five years. This survey showed that a new profile of public service workers was also emerging. Women represented 57% of PSAC members between the ages of 36 and 45, as well as 57% of members having 16 or fewer years of service. The younger members are the most likely to hold a university degree.

It's important to keep certain demographics in mind when thinking about pension security for both those retiring and those just coming into the federal public service. Given the workforce shortage, it will be crucial for the federal public service as an employer to consider how it will attract and retain competent new workers.

The PSPP is a defined benefit pension plan governed by the Public Service Superannuation Act, the PSSA. Participants in the PSPP are either contributors, retirees, surviving spouses, or children of retirees. As of March 31, 2008, women represented 55% of active contributors to the plan. This is the highest rate in history. The calculation of retirement benefits is based on the number of pensionable years of service and the average salary earned during the five consecutive highest-paid years. Consequently, the greater the number of pensionable years of service and the greater the salary earned during the five best-paid years, the larger the retirement benefit. The plan calls for an income replacement of up to 70%.

As of March 31, 2008, the annual average retirement benefit paid to women retired from the federal public service was \$17,061, which is 62.7% of the annual average amount paid to their retired male counterparts. In comparison, the annual average retirement benefit paid to women as of March 31, 1998, represented only 52.9% of the average amount paid to retired men. You can see that there is progress in closing the gap between the benefits received by male and female employees.

The progress is more noticeable when considering only the new, unreduced retirement benefit, which becomes payable during the most recent years.

Unreduced retirement benefits that became payable during a specific year include only immediate annuities payable to federal public service workers who retire from the public service at age 60 years or more, as well as immediate annuities payable to those who retire between 55 and 59 years of age after they have accrued a minimum of 30 years of pensionable time.

For the second year in a row, the annual average amount of unreduced retirement benefits that became payable to women in the year ending March 31, 2008, represented 97.7% of the average annual amount of unreduced retirement benefits that became payable to men at the same year. Unfortunately, we do not have access to the data for the percentage of women workers who have access to an unreduced pension.

Since 1970, pension benefits have been fully indexed to the rate of increase of the consumer price index. The PSPP is a defined benefit pension plan to which contributions are also mandatory. The contribution rates and the retirement terms are coordinated with the CPP and the QPP. Retirees who collect benefits from the PSPP see their benefits payable under the PSSA reduced at age 65, or as soon as they collect CPP or QPP benefits, or CPP or QPP disability benefits.

There are a few other important aspects of the plan I'd like to mention. The legislation also contains a certain number of significant provisions for women as contributors to the plan or as the spouse of a contributor—for example, the possibility of accumulating, subject to certain conditions, pensionable service during leave without pay for family obligations, maternity or parental leave, or for the relocation of a spouse; part-time employees can contribute to the plan provided their assigned work week is equal to or greater than 12 hours; benefits are paid to surviving spouses; and retirements benefits are shared in the event of a divorce as per the Pension Benefits Division Act. These aspects of the plan have resulted in enabling women to retire with some security and still contribute to the community and the economy.

Obviously, labour disputes resulting in strikes also have an impact on one's ability to retire. For example, our members who work at the Museum of Civilization and the War Museum, a bargaining unit that is definitely female-dominated, has been on strike for 72 days. For those workers who are not term employees, every day on strike is one day longer until retirement.

It will come as no surprise to anyone that we stress the fact that the pension benefits paid to federal public service workers are deferred wages. All contributions paid into the PSPP constitute a portion of our members' overall compensation. A significant portion of the salary of a federal public service worker contributing to the PSPP is paid in the form of contributions required under the CPP or QPP and the Public Service Superannuation Act. In addition, the contribution rate pertaining to the contributions that employees are required to pay into their pension plans under the Public Service Superannuation Act will continue to increase until 2013. In fact, contributions to the PSPP between 2005 and 2013 will have increased 41% on the workers' side. By 2013, employee contributions will represent approximately 40% of the cost of all pension benefits. In theory, the employer pays the remaining 60%. This represents a portion of the public sector worker's salary, and that is very clear at the bargaining table.

Without getting into a discussion of actuarial models and the solvency ratios of pension funds, we can say that given the very long-term nature of defined benefit pension plans, they may post deficits at times and surpluses at others. We know that back in 1999 the government resorted to legislation, Bill C-78, to take \$30 billion from the surpluses of the three public service pension plans, and as

I'm sure you all know, PSAC and 12 other plaintiffs are currently suing the federal government in an attempt to recover this money.

• (1545)

According to a Statistics Canada study published in November 2007, the percentage of women who have a certified pension plan has been increasing steadily over the past 30 years. Better-educated women are looking for organizations that provide security through a good pension plan.

The pension fund covered by the Public Service Superannuation Act is a perfect example of a pension plan that enables women to retire from the labour force while still maintaining a decent standard of living thanks to the deferred salary they have accumulated throughout their working lives as federal public service workers.

The federal government also benefits as the employer, because it can recruit a competent workforce more easily and retain them longer.

Canadian taxpayers also come out ahead when the retirees, with their households, are receiving sufficient incomes to be able to contribute to the community and the economy, and potentially the retirees are prevented from qualifying for the guaranteed income supplement.

The message cannot be any clearer: our members have been contributing to a pension plan that has ensured that women can retire with security and dignity. This plan has reduced the chances that women in the federal public service will retire poor, unlike too many Canadian women who must depend solely on the Canada Pension Plan, or Quebec Pension Plan, and the OAS.

As you know, Annette Marquis has joined me. She is one of the disability and pension officers at the PSAC. Although I didn't say it at the beginning, we pooled the presentation time so that we would be available for questions.

• (1550)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): Thank you. I appreciate that very much.

We'll begin with Madam Zarac, for seven minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome, ladies.

Ms. Ducharme, in the introduction to your brief headed "Brief to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women on Women and Pension Security", you mentioned that in recent decades, women made pension gains, especially in the public sector. We know that the public service provides very good retirement programs.

Is this also true if we look beyond the public sector?

Ms. Annette Marquis (Département de la Santé et des Services sociaux, Lib.): To which paragraph are you referring?

Mrs. Lise Zarac: The first paragraph.

Ms. Annette Marquis: Yes. This paragraph is a summary of the results of a number of studies by Statistics Canada which can be read on its Website. Even though I did not write this paragraph, I know the studies on which it is based but I cannot tell you if...

Mrs. Lise Zarac: The paragraph says that women have seen an improvement in their pensions. They are getting better pension benefits than 10 years ago. However, it also says that this is mainly due to the public sector. If we were to look beyond this sector, would the same assertion still be true? If we exclude the public service from the statistics, do women still get better pensions today than 10 years ago?

Ms. Annette Marquis: I am unable to tell you. I do not recall specifically if this study by Statistics Canada was able to distinguish between the progress made across society and what is left if the public sector is taken out.

One thing is certain, most public sector employees have defined benefit pension plans. The contributions they are required to pay are much higher than those paid by employees in society as a whole. That is a fact. I could reread the study and —

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Could we have the figures with the public sector excluded?

Ms. Annette Marquis: You would have to get those from Statistics Canada.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Thank you.

Ms. Ducharme, you mentioned a very important point, the manpower shortage that we will see in coming years.

That being the case, maybe we should ask ourselves some questions, because we do not want to see companies take advantage of this situation in order to penalize those who want to retire. Do you see this as a possibility? If so, by what means could it happen?

How could we counter this? We know that there will be a shortage, you said so yourself. We talk here about the general rate of exclusion. This could be used as a device to compel people to remain in the labour force for longer, which would not be positive for everyone. How can we prevent such situations from happening?

• (1555)

[English]

Ms. Patty Ducharme: Given the coming shortage of skilled workers and skilled people to come in and staff jobs in the federal public service, I know the government likes to talk about being the employer of choice. Different parts of the core administration of the federal public service like to refer to themselves as the employer of choice. That said, oftentimes the compensation for those workers doesn't necessarily compare to the compensation of workers in the private sector.

Obviously one of the big benefits of working in the federal public sector is the benefit of the total compensation, which includes the defined benefit of the pension plan. Despite the fact that people have to invest a full career to see a full pension, I believe most workers who enter the federal public service do so for several reasons. One of them is knowing there's some level of security with respect to their overall compensation. That's critically important to most of us in planning our lives.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Indeed, being the largest employer, it should set an example for others to follow. I agree with you.

Earlier you also mentioned pensions that can be transferred to survivors. We have discussed this and often heard in this committee that women live longer than men. However, they have less income. This is a way to ensure that they will have enough to live on. Does this feature exist only in the public sector? Is it a benefit that should be included in all retirement programs?

[English]

Ms. Patty Ducharme: That's an interesting question. The pension that is transferred to surviving spouses in the death of a worker would be 50% of their pension.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Fifty percent for how long, until the death of the surviving spouse?

Ms. Patty Ducharme: Right.

I think the concept of having a defined benefit pension plan that private sector employers could participate in and would be transferable would be a great thing for Canada. Most of us want to know that when we retire from work it doesn't fall solely on our individual shoulders but that there has been a collective investment in the future of workers so that all workers can retire with dignity and with some knowledge that they're going to have financial stability in their old age, and there are large, large pension plans.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Merci.

Do I still have some time?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): No. Thank you.

Madame Demers, for seven minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair. I will share my time with my colleague.

Thank you for coming, ladies. I have two small questions for you.

You say that 64% of your members are women. However, you also said that as of March 31, 2008, the average annual retirement benefit paid to women was \$17,061, which is 62.7% of the annual average amount paid to their retired male counterparts. Can you explain why? Is it because you have not yet reached pay equity? Are women paid lower salaries?

On another subject, on page 6 of your document, you say that it is possible to accumulate, subject to certain conditions, pensionable service during leave without pay for family obligations. Did you achieve this as a result of collective bargaining?

My last question is about the 30 billion dollars that you lost. How come you let those slip away?

•(1600)

[English]

Ms. Patty Ducharme: First of all, we talked about the gap on, I believe, page 5 of the English brief. It's on page 5 in the French version as well.

The gap is that 62.7% of the average annual amount is paid to women as compared to their male counterparts. On the bottom you'll see the graph that shows that wage gap pictorially. If you look at the bottom of that graph—and I apologize for the very small print, which is very taxing at my age—the first bullet says:

Include immediate annuities, disability retirement benefits, and annual allowances payable to former contributors only

You can see here that the benefits being paid out are not simply full pensions; they also include people who go off on disability pensions and people who are injured on the job and go out through assorted pensions. It's not a reflection of those who go off on an unreduced pension. A lot of things here actually show the difference from a purely gender perspective, but given that we can't factor out the unreduced pensions piece, we can't show you with hard numbers a really solid comparison between men and women.

You also asked a question about leave without pay for workers. The answer depends on the type of leave without pay that workers go off on. For some types of leave without pay, such as maternity and parental leave, the employer continues to pay the employer's share. However, when the worker comes back from maternity or parental leave, they would then pay their share for their absence.

For other types of leave, such as relocation for spouse, I believe the employee is the person who ends up paying their share, meaning the employer's share and then their share for the current period when they come back to work. If, for example, you had taken three years of leave without pay to follow your spouse to the House of Commons, and you couldn't get a job as a public sector worker in Ottawa, you would be paying triple superannuation when you got back to your job. You would triple your contributions. The same is the case for things like education leave. That can be dependent on the employer's discretion.

You can see that for situations such as spousal relocation leave, we don't have the hard statistics. Treasury Board would be able to provide you with those, but I'm quite certain that the majority of those cases would be women following their male spouses.

You asked a question about the \$30 billion and the lawsuit. That was a few years ago, and we're actually going through the court case. It was back in 1999; it was Bill C-78. It was \$30 billion, and it came from the three federal public service pension plans.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Annette Marquis: To answer the question of Ms. Demers, I would like to clarify that pensions are not subject to collective bargaining, they are determined by law.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: You talked about the strike by museum staff and the impact it has on the workers' retirement, but I did not quite understand. I would like some clarification on this.

On a different subject, there is a lot of talk about out-sourcing in the federal government. Rules have been imposed in collective agreements about subcontracting and this is what they are trying to do at the museum. You say many women enjoy an excellent pension plan, but what will be left if the present rate of subcontracting continues unabated?

As for pay equity, I would like to know what will be the impact of the legislation that amended the previous pay equity regime that was applicable to your defined benefit pension plans. It was advantageous to women because all these aspects were excluded from bargaining, they were determined by law. But the large salary decreases that will eventually take place will hit them hard. Subjecting these features to collective bargaining means that the power relationship will apply.

So I would like to know what impact there will be on the pension plan since yours, as you said, is one of the pillars.

•(1605)

[English]

Ms. Patty Ducharme: Thank you for the question.

With respect to our members who work at the Museum of Civilization and the War Museum, they work for the museum corporation and do participate in the plan. Unfortunately, many of those workers are term hires, so they're not permanent employees and don't actually have full access to all benefits available to permanent and indeterminate staff. Obviously, if they're not working, they don't accrue pensionable time. That comes as no surprise; however, it is dismaying to realize that workers can be left out on the sidewalk for 72 days, quite honestly.

With respect to the question of pay equity, pay equity has a very measurable impact on the actual pension benefit on retirement. In 1999, following the large Treasury Board settlement and the \$3-billion payout to public sectors workers current and past, for those whose salary was increased, for their final five years of work it had a really significant impact on their pension benefit as retirees. As you know, most of these workers worked in female-dominated work groups, which we sometimes refer to as "pink ghettos", where women are working and the value of their work has not always been financially or economically recognized by the employer.

So those differences, those adjustments to their wages, made a huge difference for their pension benefits and their ability to participate fully in society as retirees.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): Thank you.

Madame Boucher, for seven minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoulu, CPC): Welcome, ladies. Thank you for coming. Our committee is looking at pension security, a very interesting subject. We have heard from many witnesses.

There are more and more women in the labour force. The baby-boom generation and women between 40 and 60 years of age have better access to the labour market. In your view, what will be the impact of this on the poverty rate of these women after they retire?

[English]

Ms. Patty Ducharme: If we're talking about federal public sector workers who have the opportunity for an unreduced pension, so if they have not had to take leave without pay for assorted reasons or if they haven't entered into their career in the public service later in age, I would like to believe that our pension benefits will provide people with an adequate level of funding to enjoy their old age.

If you look at page 6, in both the French and the English, at table 4, you'll see a table entitled "Unreduced Pensions (Immediate Annuities)". For people in 2008 who are lucky enough to have an unreduced pension, the average pension is—I'm just trying to see if we actually have a dollar amount—\$32,936. Those people will hopefully be able to look after themselves with that amount of money.

• (1610)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I have another question. There has been a lot of talk about private versus public pensions. Some say that private pension plans are better for women and others are of the opposite view. Do you believe there should only be public pension plans, only private pensions or both at the same time?

[English]

Ms. Patty Ducharme: I would have to ask for some clarification with respect to what you mean by private pension plans vis-à-vis public pension plans. If you were talking about a defined benefit plan, as opposed to a defined contribution plan, I could answer that question more readily, but talking about a public versus private plan, I'm not entirely certain of what you are looking for.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: The public service has its own pension plan and some private corporations have their own private pension fund. Some of our witnesses said that private plans in some sectors are better. However, in the public sector, benefits are much higher.

Do you believe we should have only one pension scheme in Canada that would be accessible to everyone? If we open up the CPP, should this be on a voluntary basis or should the employers be compelled to provide the funding?

[English]

Ms. Patty Ducharme: The larger the pension plan, the more spread out the risk.

I'm not an actuary. I want to say that very clearly: I am not an actuary. I am absolutely not a pensions expert. But I understand the concept that risk is diluted with more people in the pool.

We certainly support a defined benefit pension plan. Our staff has one, and we believe that sharing the cost of a defined benefit pension plan is fair and reasonable. As you can see again from the statistics and the information provided to you, federal public sector workers contribute 9.6%, I believe, of their pay on average to their pension plans. That is both in the form of the Canada Pension Plan or the

Quebec Pension Plan and their benefits under the public service superannuation plan. It has been a successful plan, a beneficial plan, because it is such a large plan.

I think it would be really wonderful for people if they could participate in a very large plan and that people would have portability so that they could come from the private sector into the public sector, and on.

With respect to your question about private sector plans, I guess it's a question about whether a plan is better or not. I've never been a member of a private sector plan. I've been a public service worker since I was a kid. I suppose if I were making a lot of money in the private sector and getting paid a really large salary, there might be a correlating benefit to a bigger pension plan, but again I'm mindful of the fact that many private plans are not fully funded and aren't as stable financially in the long term.

So from where I sit, big defined benefit plans that distill the risk, that spread the risk out, definitely serve our members well. That serves the public well, and in the long term benefits the economy and society, because we don't have women in particular—since we're focused on women here, given that they have unreduced pension benefits—living at high levels of poverty.

• (1615)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): I am going to give myself a couple of minutes here.

I want to thank you again very much for the light you have shed on this issue, because when we began there was a great deal of information and it was very often confusing. You've helped us to sort out a great deal of that with your presentation.

You began by talking about the calculation for pension benefits. Currently, it's the rate of the consumer price index. There are two issues here. The first is that some years ago there was a miscalculation on the CPI, and that has negatively impacted pensioners to the tune of about \$1 billion. Second, we heard from a witness that the calculation of pension benefit would be more appropriately based on a percentage of the average industrial wage, because that increases at a higher rate than the CPI. Do you have any comments on either of those two points?

Ms. Patty Ducharme: I have to be really honest, Madam Chair. I think it's really unfortunate when there is a miscalculation or an error made and the people who are supposed to be benefiting from whatever the program is pay for the error. I think that is really very unfortunate and obviously should somehow be corrected in the long term, although I can't speak to the specifics.

With respect to the average industrial wage, we've never really discussed that at PSAC as an organization. We've had broad discussions around pension plans and we're really committed to defined benefit plans. To date we've accepted the practice of basing the defined benefit plan on our members' actual earnings, but I think we would be open to a broader societal discussion about basing pension plans on the average industrial wage. It would definitely be a way of eliminating the issue of gender discrimination in old age if women and men were treated alike under whatever pension plan they're participating in.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): Thank you.

With reference to the defined benefit plan, we've heard a lot of contradictory testimony. It's very clear that the defined benefit plan is a superior plan because of the reduction in risk, but there has been this argument that it creates an unacceptable or difficult burden on the employer.

Yet when you talked about the public service plan, you talked about the fact that back in 1999, the government took \$30 billion out of the surplus. From this discussion about the defined benefit plan being very rich in times when the economy is decline, it would seem to me that if the employer might find it very difficult to meet the obligations of the defined benefit plan, then the protection of the surplus would go a long way toward ensuring that those ups and downs are covered, and that the superiority of the defined benefit plan is such that we should be pursuing that kind of area.

• (1620)

Ms. Patty Ducharme: I have to agree, and it's my understanding that some changes have been made to broader pension legislation quite recently with respect to the funding of pension plans—I believe it's private sector plans—to ensure that plan trustees will be able to keep larger surpluses on the books for longer periods of time, as opposed to having to resort to pension holidays, payouts, or increased benefits. The plans are not hit hard when there are fluctuations in the market, and people are not caught flat-footed when there are situations like the economic crisis that we've seen around the world in the last 18 months.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): Thank you.

One last question before I give up the chair.

I was quite taken with the statement about retirees who, with a sufficient income, are able to contribute to the economy because their pension benefits are such that they're not in poverty and they are actually active members of the community.

You mention in your brief that they won't need to collect the guaranteed income supplement. It seems to me that, in addition to this, the health problems and mental health issues would be avoided, as would emotional insecurity, and the reality of not being able to live in your own home because you don't have sufficient income to do that. This would underscore the need for decent pensions and making sure that there is no retiree in our country who is in that jeopardized situation.

Ms. Patty Ducharme: I completely agree, Madam Chair.

I think the statistics show in Canada that the higher your socio-economic class—for lack of a better word—the better your health is, the better your full participation in society is, and you are better able to function more fully. That's definitely what we're committed to seeing, not only for our members, but truly for all Canadians.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Irene Mathysen): Thank you very much.

In the next round, Madame Neville for five minutes.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much for being here once again.

I hope I haven't missed the question. Do you have any comments on survivors' benefits for your pension plan, for CPP, and whether those should be changed?

Ms. Patty Ducharme: The survivors' benefit for those who participate in our plan—and I had to refer to my technical expert, and I apologize for that.... Our members accrue a benefit of 2% per year of full-time work, and the survivors' benefit is half of that. So if I had a spouse and I had been married to my spouse for ten years and something unfortunate happened and I died, my spouse would get 10% as a survivor's benefit.

I guess the question then becomes, what's reasonable? I think there does have to be some bridging. I appreciate that in many jobs people do get a death benefit as well. That's the equivalent of two years' salary, which would help people out in the short term transitionally.

Quite honestly, if you have kids and you've been unfortunate enough to get terminal cancer or AIDS—it's World AIDS Day—and you die, and your spouse is left with kids, and you have a 10% benefit, it's not particularly helpful in advancing your standing. Economically you're supporting your survivors—your kids or your spouse.

• (1625)

Hon. Anita Neville: I'm flabbergasted, to be perfectly blunt. You're saying you need to be married 50 years to get a 50% survivor benefit. Is that what you're telling me?

Ms. Patty Ducharme: No, you get 50%... If I had worked 35 years and I had a full pension, I would have a 70% pension, and my spouse would get 50% of my pension. Using the table that we had, table 4 on page 6, if any of the individuals in the final column in 2008 were to die—and were married prior to being 65—their surviving spouse would have the benefit of 50% of what that pension is. So rather than \$32,900 or whatever it was, you'd get around \$16,000.

That's pretty low. I've got to say I don't know if anyone in this room could live on \$16,000, but I'll be really honest, I sure couldn't.

Hon. Anita Neville: Can you comment on the CPP survivor benefit?

Ms. Annette Marquis: To be honest with you, I don't know the rate that the CPP is paying in terms of survivor benefits, whether it's a fixed amount or a percentage. We have to keep in mind that if we compare what the CPP pays to a person who worked for 30 or 35 years, the contribution that comes from the CPP is deemed to replace only 25% of the salary earned during the person's working life.

As I mentioned, I don't know the rate that the CPP pays to survivors, but I've never seen any pension plan, whether it's public or private, that would give full benefits to the survivor.

Survivors of people who rely only on CPP and OAS are poor. We don't have to know the percentage that the survivors get. As long as we know that the retiree gets a very low benefits cheque, we know that the amount given to the survivor is going to be lower. You cannot expect more than \$10,000 or \$11,000 from CPP per year.

Hon. Anita Neville: In your own plan, given that a disproportionate number of survivors are women, who tend to live longer, is this an issue you have been dealing with, the issue of survivor benefits? I'm quite surprised when you tell me what the reality is.

• (1630)

Ms. Patty Ducharme: There's an interesting dynamic in a union environment. We hear from our union members. We don't oftentimes hear from our union members' surviving spouses. We have a free life insurance policy that our members access and we hear from members' surviving spouses when there are any problems accessing that free benefit.

But I have to be really honest. I as a vice-president here in Ottawa have not heard from survivors asking for assistance in securing their benefits or ensuring that they're getting the full benefit they're entitled to. I'm not sure if that's because people are more mindful of people when there has been a death, if pay compensation advisers in the workplace are really attentive to those people. I really can't answer that.

Hon. Anita Neville: But have you heard from your members?

Is my time up?

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): Yes, it is.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

The Chair: Cathy.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

As we explore these issues, more questions come along that I think are important. I would actually like to pick up on the point that my colleague was talking about. We're seeing from your statistics that perhaps the proportion of males to females is much more equal.

This pension plan has been around for a long time. How many years has it been in existence?

Ms. Patty Ducharme: You know something? I don't know when the Public Service Superannuation Act came into being—Was it 1954?—but it has been changed and improved along the way. It has been amended.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: One of the focuses we've talked about is seniors and poverty. Where perhaps we don't have a lot of clear data is in terms of, let's say in 1950 a much larger percentage of your workforce was male and now were getting these benefits, given what we know about mortality and females living longer, we probably have a lot of women who are existing on survivor benefits.

I'm just musing about it. You probably don't have data, but I think it would be an interesting area for the analysts to have some data on.

[Translation]

Ms. Annette Marquis: The data used to prepare Tables 3 and 4 are all drawn from the reports on the public service pension plan tabled in the Parliament of Canada. I have with me copies of some pages containing statistical tables from the last annual report for the year ending March 31, 2008 which was tabled in Parliament last spring.

I am glad you asked the question, because we have in there a statistical table that shows that in the year ending March 31, 2008, the average annual amount of pensions paid to survivors — whether legally married or common law spouses — was \$11,152 compared to an average of \$23,422 paid to all beneficiaries of the plan. We must not forget that this benefit is paid to all survivors regardless of whether they are 60, 80, 85 or 90 years old. As for the amounts in the third table, these are the figures for all beneficiaries, all retirees, whatever their age. Some are younger and others are very old. This amount did not change much over time. The annual average amount of pensions paid to surviving spouses was \$10,795 in 2007 and \$10,399 in 2006. So there is a slight increase, but the difference is small.

• (1635)

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you.

I want to try to get a couple of more questions in.

We were absolutely stunned to hear that at times the spouse was not designated the CPP beneficiary. Can that happen with this plan?

Ms. Patty Ducharme: No. If you get divorced, it's subject to the Pension Benefits Division Act. Is that what it's called? Your spouse, your legal spouse—

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: But if you're not divorced and you die...?

Ms. Patty Ducharme: We all know that legal cases can get very complicated. If you're not divorced and you're cohabiting with somebody for more than 12 months, things can get very complicated legally.

It's my understanding that you do designate your beneficiary. The worker has the responsibility to designate the beneficiary of a benefit in the event of death.

The Chair: I think that's it. I've let you go over, but that's fine.

Go ahead, Monsieur Desnoyers.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

In your brief, on page 5, you state that as of March 31, 2008, the annual average retirement benefit paid to women retired from the federal public service was \$17,061, which is 62.7% of the annual average amount paid to their retired male counterparts. You know that the poverty line is somewhere around \$23,000. Consequently, with \$17,000, these women are definitely below the poverty line. This leads me to the last sentence of your document where it says: "However, available data do not allow us to state that retirement benefits paid under the Public Service Superannuation Act are sufficient to keep all beneficiaries out of poverty." This suggests that your plan does not protect everybody against poverty.

This brings me to the position of the Canadian Labour Congress which you support. In various documents that have been tabled by different witnesses, it says that 55% of women get their main income from the public plans, i.e. the Quebec Pension Plan or the Canada Pension Plan. This is due to the fact the companies where they are employed do not have a pension plan that would complement the combined amount of the CPP benefit and Old Age Security benefit, depending on your eligibility. This means that they are very close to the poverty line.

The CLC proposes to increase the replacement rate from 25% to 50% over the long term, which would clearly help those women who are not in or who leave the labour market, either to raise children or to become informal caregivers, caring for elderly relatives.

I would like to hear your views on this. Furthermore, several witnesses said they would like to see a national summit on pensions in Canada, to discuss all pensions but more specifically the issue of women's pensions. I would like to hear your views on this, even if this makes for a lot of questions.

[English]

Ms. Patty Ducharme: I think having a national summit on pensions or a national summit on gender equality and women's full participation in the economy would be a grand thing. I would definitely want to be there. I'd send some cards and ask you to invite me.

Seriously, though, I think this is a huge issue. It impacts every single person in this room, regardless of whether you're a member of Parliament or not. I know some of you have daughters, sisters, or mothers who are definitely impacted by the fact that if they worked as a secretary in a law office or even if they were a lawyer, they didn't have a pension plan.

I have to be really honest. When I was a young public sector worker, I didn't think I'd live to retire. There was sort of this arrogance of youth that I was going to move to a different job and do something else. Obviously, I did move to something different, but I'm certainly happy that I was a public sector worker and that I was obligated to participate in the superannuation plan. I'm very grateful to the Government of Canada for having the foresight to come up with a national superannuation plan. And I look at people I work with and I know that they feel the same way.

I think that in our current society we like to individualize collective problems. I find that tendency to be quite scary. We have an obligation to look after our old and our young. Those of us who are able to, can go and work. We can hopefully earn a living wage. But for those who can't, we need to be able to take care of those people and to ensure that they can provide for themselves and for their offspring.

Our plan is not a perfect plan. It still has shortcomings. I talked about if you relocated with your spouse and you've got a job that's not a high-paying job.... Let's face it, most public sector jobs are not the jobs we read about in the newspaper, where people are making huge sums of money. Most public sector jobs are people earning in and around \$40,000 a year and trying to support their families on that.

If you come back to work after a leave and you've got to pay triple superannuation for three years so that you can buy back three years' worth of leave without pay, and you're paying back the employer's portion, your portion, and your current portion for working, odds are you're going to opt out of buying back those three years. That has a direct impact on people as they get old, and on their ability to look after themselves. And then it's society, be it the gains supplement.... We all pay again for it, and at the cost of their dignity. And human dignity is a critical part to a full participation in society.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Patty.

May I remind everyone that we do have a vote. Bells start at 5:15 and we have a motion, so we need to have some time. I would like us to finish at 5 o'clock so we can have 15 minutes for whatever is going to happen in terms of members' business.

We have two people. I'd like everyone to stay within the times for their questions and answers, please.

Irene.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll be very brief.

Last week we had Professor Lynn McDonald here. She talked about women who experience forced retirement. These are women who are caregivers for their children or for infirm spouses or for relatives they need to provide care for. They are also women who are forced to retire because of their own health issues.

They may wish to come back into the job market after their caregiving days are done, but their skills are out of date or they're perceived as being too old to come back, so they're pushed into retirement before they're ready. As a result, their CPP is most definitely not adequate, and they're reduced to living on OAS and GIS. The cut-off in terms of OAS and GIS is about \$12,000 a year. That's what you get if you don't have CPP, and yet the low-income cutoff is \$18,000.

In terms of the CPP, I know there's a flexibility there. If you retire early, you take a 5% penalty; if you stay late, you have a 6% reward. The government is currently looking at perhaps changing this by increasing the penalty if you retire early and increasing the incentive at the other end if you stay later.

It seems to me that these women who are forced into early retirement are caught in a trap. Would you comment on that, and perhaps suggest a way to ensure that women aren't victimized by this proposed change? Is there a way of increasing the incentive for delaying retirement without this penalty at the end?

• (1645)

Ms. Patty Ducharme: I think people who are caregiving family members should be accruing pensionable time under the Canada Pension Plan. If we look at traditional stereotypical gender roles, if a husband's sick, the wife or the woman in his life is going to look after him at home. She's going to save a whack of money for the public purse in home care, hospital costs, etc., and she is obviously going to take a big hit economically at the end of it.

The same would be said for a man who would be willing to do that. Traditionally, however, in our society—and that would be an interesting study to do, I suppose—more women end up in hospitals when they have terminal illnesses, or they end up being cared for at home by other women family members, such as a mother, a sister, or a daughter.

Those gendered roles in our society definitely have an impact on the economic well-being of women for the rest of their lives. When they're doing something that we should be providing—and we should be providing home care—we should ensure that they are economically made whole at the end of that situation.

The Chair: Now we have Dave Van Kesteren.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Thank you again for showing up.

My colleague was going to ask you this question, and it's a good one. Years ago, in Cathy's case, she was younger and she wanted to do some travelling. She took the money out of her pension and used it for travel. Can you still do that?

Ms. Patty Ducharme: If you leave the public service and your pension hasn't vested, you can take the money out, but it's your portion and your portion alone.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: So it's still possible for people to do that.

When that's been exercised, the question that begs to be answered is what is our responsibility as a society when those people reach retirement age?

Ms. Patty Ducharme: Say, for example, you decided to teach English or learn French or do something overseas and you were gone for a period that exceeded...so that you had to cash out your pension. You weren't 40, your pension wasn't vested, and you chose to take the money out. If you come back to a public sector job and you have the option of buying back that pensionable time, you buy it back. It's the same with the military. It's the same with municipal police forces. I personally bought back time from working as a summer student as a border services officer.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: But what if you can't?

Let me give you another example. Somebody is 40, so they're able still to opt out, and they thought perhaps that they would try their chance in the private sector. They needed the money and took it out, but things didn't turn out. What is our responsibility to those people who wouldn't be able to recoup that money?

• (1650)

Ms. Patty Ducharme: We have other public pensions. We have the Canada Pension Plan, and we absolutely support increasing the quantum of the Canada Pension Plan. We think that is critically important.

People do make decisions that, obviously, they are responsible for. I certainly wouldn't go out and promote to our membership that since they are not 40, to withdraw all their money, which to me is taking a 50% hit.

Actually your pension investments are taking taken a 60% hit, because you get a little bit of interest but you don't see any of the employer's portion. In the long run, the plan benefits because it gets

to keep what in theory is the employer's 60% contribution. That is certainly not something I would promote to people. It doesn't make any sense.

I would question, though, why we would bar people from buying back pensionable time when in fact the plan is unjustifiably enriched after people have left the plan, given the employer's contribution is 60% and the worker's contribution is 40%.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: There is another troubling trend. We are seeing a pretty good growth in the public sector, but in the private sector we are seeing shrinkage in the pension plans. More and more, that gap is starting to widen. In the private sector, for whatever reason—whether companies are stressed at this point or whether people just don't make the choice.... Do you see it as a problem? Are you thinking that if we don't get a handle on this, if we don't improve the private sector, we may have some real disparity here that causes social difficulty?

Ms. Patty Ducharme: I definitely believe that pension funds need to be funded. I think it's criminal behaviour when companies fail to fund their pension plans or rob them to take unreasonable risks, to pay debts, or to acquire new assets.

I appreciate that there are many companies, not just in Canada but around the world, that have seen their pension plans really devalue due to the economic downturn, so that if they had to totally pay out the plan they don't have the means to do so. If a plan is well managed and well administered by trustees, people need to be given the time and opportunity to get the plan fully funded again.

Having strong pension plans is just good public policy. We are one of the richest countries in the world. Corporations and the public sector should have good pension plans. That is always framed by a good, strong legislative framework that ensures that plans are adequately funded for those who have contributed into the plan.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Patty.

I think the time is up. We've finished with the round of questions.

Before I thank the witnesses, there is one thing I would like to ask of the witnesses, and it follows up on Mr. Van Kesteren's question.

Do you think there should be some kind of legislation brought in that would penalize in some way companies that have, as you say, spent the pension plan money on assets, etc.? Secondly, do you think it would stop this from happening if private pension funds that are now run by particular companies for their workers were actually given to an independent third party to manage those funds—so it was hived out of the company? Will those two things help?

The third question is this. You talked about something that most people have not talked about, which is of great concern to me, and that is the fact that many people who have not been in the paid workforce tend to have nothing to depend on when they retire but OAS and sometimes GIS—and hopefully some sort of survivor benefit if they were married.

Those three things I would like a quick answer on, Patty, because then I have to go for it.

•(1655)

Ms. Patty Ducharme: You like saying to me, “A quick answer”.

The Chair: I know, I do.

Ms. Patty Ducharme: Yes, I think there should be a strong legislative framework for pensions and for private plans.

I'm a trustee on a private plan, and I know I have to do training. Our plan is audited. We have an actuarial report that's filed with Revenue Canada on a regular basis. The trustees of that plan take those responsibilities very, very seriously.

If we were not taking those responsibilities seriously and the plan was unable to make good on its commitments to fulfill the promises made, and it was because we had been irresponsible or frivolous with the funds, I think that criminal charges are completely reasonable. It's theft.

With respect to your question about unpaid labour, I really believe that people who have been home caregivers in society should have a basic pension independent of a spousal benefit. Quite frankly, you could find yourself in an unpleasant domestic situation where you've been a caregiver and you have an abusive family member or an abusive spouse. I wouldn't want to see a person have to live with that person or be obligated to, if at a certain point in their life they decide it's time to leave such a hostile environment.

I'm sorry, I don't remember your third question.

The Chair: I asked you three, but I think you answered the two-in-one question, which was about taking private pensions and having them off into a separate trusteeship so they don't stay within the companies' coffers. That's what I asked. I think you answered that.

Ms. Patty Ducharme: It has to be funded. It has to be separate from the books. It can't be part of your corporate.... There has to be a separate entity that's your pension fund, and it has to be funded.

Let's just look at what's gone on with Nortel with the self-funded disability. This was the richest company in Canada. To suggest that those workers who are now on disability should fund Nortel is shameless and despicable. Those people contributed to that company and its success, and the fact that they're now poor with no access to funds is completely unacceptable in today's society.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Patty. As always, you answer your questions clearly and with strength.

Thank you very much, Ms. Marquis, for coming.

Ms. Patty Ducharme: Thank you.

•(1700)

The Chair: All right, it's exactly five o'clock, and the first thing on the agenda is the motion by Ms. McLeod.

I would like us to be succinct on this motion, because I would like to present to you not problems, but challenges we're going to have within the next three meetings with regard to some things we had planned to do, just to see if you have any solutions for it.

The first thing is Ms. McLeod's motion:

That the committee call on officials from the Ministries of Public Safety, Health, Justice, and the Status of Women, as well as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police,

to discuss programs, policies, and action currently being undertaken to address violence against aboriginal women.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Can I speak, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: First of all, I know we have a busy time up to December and we are also committed to doing the Olympic piece, so I am not talking about doing this until the new year. Doing that update before the Olympics is a priority, but we haven't actually had a discussion on this issue, at least since my time in this group. I'm not saying let's do a study. I'm saying at least let's find out from our public agencies what's being done.

I'm not trying to hijack our agenda or the very important work that we've done in any way, but this is an important issue, and I would feel more comfortable having these witnesses come to talk to us.

Again, it's not imminent, it's....

The Chair: And you see this as one meeting?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Well, I think, again, in respect to not hijacking the agenda of the plan we've already made....

The Chair: Okay, now Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

I support Ms. McLeod's idea totally, and I have an amendment to her motion. I think it's a little bit lengthy to be—

The Chair: Is it a friendly one? Do you think she—

Hon. Anita Neville: I think it's too lengthy to be a friendly one, but let me read it and see what she says:

That the committee call on officials from the Ministries of Public Safety, Health, Justice, Indian and Northern Affairs, and the Status of Women, as well as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, to discuss programs, policies, and action currently being undertaken to address violence against aboriginal women; and that the committee further invite, but is not limited to, representatives of NWAC, the AFN Women's Council, the Métis National Council of Women, Pauktuutit, the Quebec Native Women's Association, the Native Women's Association of the NWT, the YWCA, along with individual advocates on the issue of violence against aboriginal women, including but not limited to Sharon McIvor, Ellen Gabriel, Bev Jacobs, Mavis Erikson, and Debra Hanuse.

The Chair: All right, thank you.

Cathy.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Obviously that isn't a friendly amendment because it's really changing things from a blip to a pretty comprehensive study. I think we need to have discussion around the table. Are we wanting to engage in a comprehensive discussion, as opposed to the blip?

The Chair: Okay, so let's discuss the amendment on the table.

Yes, Nicole.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, I am very happy, I find this is an excellent idea.

I had previously asked that we study this because aboriginal women are subjected to a lot of violence. I am very happy that various departments are being asked to come and explain what they have done and what the various interested parties are doing. We should also hear from people from the various aboriginal communities. I am sure that actions are undertaken in aboriginal communities for the prevention of violence against women that we are not aware of.

So we could get a real comprehensive picture but this would require more than one meeting. One meeting is really too short. We could only get a quick overview but I believe that this deserves a more in-depth study. It is a very good idea.

• (1705)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there anyone else wanting to discuss this?

Yes, Dave.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: I was very pleased when I heard that this motion was being put forward.

I think Candice, if she were here, might have that, or Cathy might have that, but here is just a perfect example. This is an article in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, and it's on B10: "Police seek help to find teen girl". This is an aboriginal girl. The fact that this is found in the back of the paper is sad. It's time, and I think this would really be a great thing that we could set out to do.

The Chair: Are you therefore speaking for or against the amendment? It sounds as though you're speaking in favour of it.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: I think we're discussing the amendment. I think, first of all, that the motion is excellent. Something has to be done.

When I was in B.C., I drove down the Highway of Tears, I believe they call it, and I know it's a hot topic among many people in that area. I think, Cathy, this has also manifested itself in your riding. I think that's why you brought it out. I think it was just stated that we have to talk about whether we want to have a prolonged discussion or whether we can talk about this just for one session, but it is worthy of our discussion. I think this is a very good motion.

The Chair: You're speaking to the motion; I'm speaking to the amendment.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: I'm speaking to the motion at this point. I haven't really had time to digest the...

The Chair: All right.

Does anyone else wish to speak to the amendment?

Go ahead, Lise, and then we'll have Irene.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: This is a very important issue that we all have at heart in this Committee. I believe we need to take the time to do a thorough study, to really consider the issue. Indeed, this would require more than one meeting if we really want to go in depth. If we want to do a proper job, this is what we must do.

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, Irene.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think both the motion and the amendment propose an important discussion, a very critical discussion. I like the idea of adding in women such as Ellen Gabriel, Bev Jacobs, Mavis Erickson, and Sharon McIvor, who experienced violence.

I think it is indeed going to take more than one meeting. It will logically, I think, lead into our discussion about the language change at DFAIT. I want to say to the committee that I am very concerned about the language changes at DFAIT, and I wouldn't want to lose that discussion.

The Chair: I'm sorry; I almost can't hear you. What did you say in that last piece?

Ms. Irene Mathysen: I said that I support this motion and the amendment because the study of violence is very important nationally, but I wouldn't want to lose the discussion in terms of international violence, which was part and parcel of our proposal to look at the language change at DFAIT. I'm saying there needs to be a balance.

The Chair: So you're supporting the amendment.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Yes, but I don't—

The Chair: And you would have added more to the amendment.

Go ahead, Monsieur Desnoyers.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: I shall be brief, Madam Chair.

At one of my first meetings as a member of this Committee, Ms. Demers did indeed raise the frightening number of women who disappear without a trace. She said that we should look into it. I believe that the aboriginal community must be a part of this study in order to set things straight rather than us discussing it among ourselves.

As for the amendment that is proposed, it is obvious that we need the participation of all these people. So I support the motion.

[English]

The Chair: Well, actually, we're speaking to the amendment, not to the motion alone.

Ms. Boucher, are you speaking on the amendment or to the motion? It's to the amendment; okay, good.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I believe this is important and that everyone here realizes that we must look at this very closely. I fully agree for the very good and simple reason, as Mr. Desnoyers said, that we should not only take our own advice, regardless of our partisan affiliations, but that we should all work together and reach one single perspective. We need a wider perspective in order to find out what is really happening out there. I believe this is very important in order to get a full understanding of what is happening.

•(1710)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

I will call the vote on the amendment.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: The amendment passes unanimously, so we're looking at a study.

I thought that one of the things we might want to discuss, because we have a little bit of time, is when we will do it. I think we have four more meetings, if I'm not mistaken, on non-traditional work. If we finish that up when we come back in January—it's two weeks' work—we can then move into this. It will have to supersede whatever else we were planning to do in our planning book, and it would be, I think, something we would want to expand on in a study. I don't know how many weeks this will take, but if we were going to bring in all kinds of people, that might mean about four meetings, do you think? Five? I don't know.

Go ahead, Dave.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: I have a suggestion. Can we possibly just have a one-time meeting first, which would be an announcement to the native groups that we are going to look at this, rather than wait for a prolonged period of time, especially now just before Christmas? That would give some real encouragement to those people who are suffering through that time.

The Chair: We have to vote on the amended motion.

I was just putting this to you so that when you vote on the amended motion we might want to add something to it in terms of timelines. There is no way, Dave, that we can do this before Christmas.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: I'm not suggesting that we do it. I'm just saying that we have a preliminary meeting that just sets up the parameters, possibly. If we can send a message to those women and to those families that we're going to be doing this, they could have that before the Christmas period as something to reflect on and think about. That would give them some hope.

The Chair: That would mean we would have this preliminary meeting before Christmas.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Yes.

The Chair: We don't have time.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: We don't have time for—

The Chair: No, that's what I wanted to talk to you about. We only have three more meetings and we have to talk about the trafficking issue on the Olympics. We also have to deal with the report, which is going to be about 25 pages.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: We can make an announcement before that time. I just—

The Chair: If we agree to this and you want it to be a proper... The amendment is passed anyway, so that it would be an expanded thing. It won't take one meeting. We can announce that we're going to study this in the new year, etc., and then decide when that's going to happen.

I just wanted you to know that we have two weeks of meetings on non-traditional work to put to bed. Then we can start this one up, if you choose.

I just want to call the motion.

Are you speaking to the motion as amended?

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: I do not know any more, Madam Chair. I just want to reply to what you said.

Since it is Ms. McLeod who moved the original motion and since she is the one who wanted us to continue and finish the study on work place non-traditional roles immediately after the Holidays, it would be up to her to decide if this one should be done before the one on non-traditional roles. She should decide what priority she wants to give to these two subjects. Indeed, if we start later, this could carry us very far down the road, until the month of March. So I think we should ask Ms. McLeod what her priorities are.

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: As we have shifted from different topics, I, more than anyone, have been thinking that we have put energy into coming up with our work plan. We are very close. To me, this is a very critical topic, and I'm really glad we're doing it. I didn't want to propose a full study. I'm quite pleased with the amendment that creates a bigger study. Why don't we finish off workplace non-traditional roles and then take as many meetings as we need to really do a proper job?

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Mathysen, is this on the motion as amended?

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Yes, Madam Chair.

I appreciate what Madame Demers said with regard to perhaps prioritizing the study or the examination of violence against women or aboriginal women, but I don't want to lose sight of the plan that we have to look at the change of language at DFAIT. That is the logical extension of violence against women because it pertains to the international scene and Canada's role or responsibility to women in other countries.

•(1715)

The Chair: Having used the language “including but not limited to” here, it means that you could expand that to DFAIT if you wished, because “not limited to” gives you a certain amount of room.

I really would like to put an end to this discussion and move to the motion.

Cathy, you will end debate.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: We have a lot to focus on within the aboriginal community within Canada and violence against women within the aboriginal community. That will be comprehensive in itself.

Again, I appreciate the support and I appreciate the amendment.

The Chair: That's good. I'll call the vote.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Nicole, your hand came up just a little too late there, but it is unanimous. Thank you. This will happen in the new year.

I just want to tell you a couple of things. Given that we have only three more meetings, as you know, you're going to be getting your report on pensions on Wednesday, and we will be discussing the report on Thursday and possibly on Friday. We are looking at spending one hour on the trafficking this Thursday. That's going to take an hour off our work, and we wanted to finish this report, table it, and have this dealt with by Thursday, because we're rising and everyone agreed that they wanted this done by Thursday.

Let me tell you what it's going to look like this coming Thursday. From 3:30 to 4:30, we have the minister coming to speak to supplementary estimates and GBA. That's one hour. We have from 4:30 to 5:30 to deal with the beginning of the 25 pages of the report. That's this coming Thursday.

On Tuesday, December 8, we're going to deal for one hour with the Olympics and human trafficking. Then we have one hour to deal with ending our report and with our recommendations.

I'm putting this to you because I want to seek your wisdom as a committee on how you want to use your time. It may very well be that one of these meetings is going to have to be extended by an hour

if we're going to make it happen, because we will need to have this thing ready and done on Thursday morning.

Okay, the votes have started, so I'm just letting you know this. Maybe you can think about it, and next week when we meet, you can decide if you want an extra hour in the meeting at some point.

Also, just quickly before you go, a survivor of human trafficking has written to us and has said that she wants to come and present. She wants 10 to 15 minutes. If we add one more person to that one hour, there's no way we'll finish it. I don't know if you want to just stick with the original motion and not expand it. My belief is that if we expand it to one person, we're going to have to expand it to all the others.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, if she is a survivor, she certainly has important things to tell us.

[*English*]

The Chair: Then you're going to have to decide to do another meeting. I'm sorry, but you're on extra time. Think about it and talk about it when we come back.

The meeting is adjourned.

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