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Monday, March 15, 2010

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Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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•(1535)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): We'll now call the meeting to order pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), supplementary estimates (C) 2009-10, vote 90 under Canadian Heritage, referred to the committee on Wednesday, March 3, 2010.

The minister is appearing to answer to those supplementary estimates.

Welcome, Minister Guergis.

As you know and as we have informed you, you will be given 10 minutes to present and then there will be questions and answers. Because of the short timeframe, I will give you some sort of warning when you have three minutes left, then at one minute, and then again at 30 seconds, so that you will know how to make sure that you fit in the 10-minute time. Then I will have to ask that you end your presentation, and we will begin with our questions and answers.

Thank you for coming, Minister. Perhaps you could begin.

Hon. Helena Guergis (Minister of State (Status of Women)): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to start by saying that I think I am over by about a minute and 30 seconds in my speech. I hope that isn't a problem.

First, Madam Chair, I also want to take the opportunity to congratulate you and Madam Mathysen on your re-election as chair and vice-chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Your experience, your knowledge, and your dedication to advancing equality for women will serve this committee and Canadian women.

Earlier this month, I led Canada's delegation to the fifty-fourth session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, where I reported on Canada's progress in implementing the Beijing "Platform for Action".

While in New York, I met with Afghanistan's minister responsible for the status of women, who described to me how Canada's efforts are helping thousands of girls go to school in areas where this was previously impossible.

Haiti's minister for women thanked Canada for our ongoing assistance, which was showing tangible gains in the areas of security and governance before the earthquake, and for our continued post-earthquake support and assistance as the country rebuilds.

As I said in New York, our government believes the pursuit of equality and the full participation of women require a wide variety of players, including non-governmental organizations, the private

sector, and all levels of government cooperating and working together. That is why I am particularly pleased that Canada had the largest number ever of non-governmental organizations in attendance at the UN.

Prior to the opening of the fifty-fourth session, I, as head of the Canadian delegation, met with and discussed priorities for the first time ever with over 20 different organizations from a diversity of sectors, including education, labour, women's groups, and businesses. I understand we've set a precedent.

Our plan to ensure progress towards equality for women has three pillars: increasing women's economic security and prosperity, ending violence against women, and enhancing women's leadership and democratic participation. We have already implemented many elements of this plan and we will continue to do so in the months and years ahead.

The facts are that we have experienced very solid progress in a number of areas, including: increased levels of education; reducing poverty; increasing economic participation; and increasing power and decision-making.

A lot of progress has taken place in Canada when it comes to women and girls. For example, in 2007, women represented 61% of all university graduates, compared to 55% in 1998. The high school dropout rate has fallen to 7% from 9% in 2002. In 2009, for the first time, Canadian women became the majority in the workforce at 50.9%, up from 47% in 2004. Women are starting small businesses at twice the rate of men, and the persistent earnings gap is narrowing.

But we all know that there is still more work to do. The challenges that women and girls continue to face are real and prevent countless numbers from realizing their full potential. That is why our government is committed to doing all it can to ensure that every woman and every girl has the opportunity to become a full and active participant in our economy.

We have improved the Canada child tax benefit, the child benefit supplement, and the child disability benefit, and we have introduced the universal child care benefit to put more money in the hands of women and their families. In addition, as of January 31, the Fairness for the Self-Employed Act will extend self-employment benefits—maternity, parental, sickness, and compassionate care—to self-employed Canadians, a growing number of whom are women, as I've already mentioned.

We have also taken steps to better protect women and girls by raising the age of sexual consent from 14 to 16 years to shield young people from sexual exploitation by adult predators. We're ending the use of house arrest for offences that involve violent sexual crimes, and we're improving the availability of testimonial aids for vulnerable adult victims and witnesses who have experienced violence. The government is also ensuring and issuing temporary resident permits and providing other supports to victims of human trafficking to enable them to regain their health.

As our recent Speech from the Throne and Budget 2010 demonstrate, we are building on actions that have already made a difference in the lives of Canadians to ensure even brighter futures for women and their families.

Through Budget 2010, our government will invest in measures that directly protect jobs, including extensions to work sharing and investments in training and skills development for youth. This will ensure greater flexibility for women workers, many of whom struggle to find a work-life balance, and more opportunities for young women launching their careers.

For example, our government will provide more than \$600 million over three years to help attract talented people, strengthen Canada's capacity for world-leading research and development, and improve commercialization of research.

● (1540)

We will give \$2.2 billion to enable industries and communities to support adjustment and provide job opportunities in those parts of Canada that have been hit hardest by the economic downturn.

We will improve the universal child care benefit so that the tax treatment of single parents is comparable to that of single-earner two-parent families.

We will continue to support foreign credential recognition with \$30 million in 2010-11, which builds on the \$20 million provided in 2009-10, and will help ensure increased opportunities for immigrant women.

We will provide \$1.6 billion in 2010 to strengthen benefits for unemployed workers. This support includes up to five additional weeks of employment insurance regular benefits for all eligible claimants, providing greater access to employment insurance regular benefits for long-tenure workers and extending the duration and scope of the work-sharing program.

We will add \$6.6 million to enhance the existing federal victims strategy, including better access to employment insurance sickness benefits for families affected by a crime. We will invest \$10 million over two years to address the disturbingly high number of missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada.

In 2006, over half of Canadian women aged 25 to 64 had completed post-secondary education, giving Canadian women the highest rate of post-secondary education attainment among OECD countries. This high level of educational attainment has positioned the younger generation of Canadian women very strongly to meet the needs of the labour market and a globally competitive knowledge-based economy.

Budget 2010 provides a one-year \$30 million increase in funding for the skills link, a component of the youth employment strategy, to assist more young Canadians while the labour market recovers. This initiative will provide more opportunities for young Canadians to successfully join the labour market. The women's program also supports pre-employment skills development projects that work to improve the economic security of women, particularly vulnerable and hard-to-reach women.

Senior women, those living in rural areas, those without reliable public transportation, and widowed, divorced, separated, and immigrant women face issues of isolation. Budget 2010 provides \$10 million over two years to increase funding for the New Horizons for Seniors program. The enhanced funding will support projects that focus on volunteering among seniors and ensure that today's seniors can mentor the next generation of volunteers and pass on their valuable skills. It will also support projects that focus on raising awareness of financial abuse of our seniors.

Our government has supported and will continue to support Canadian women and girls to enable their full participation in the life of our country. For example, we have increased women's economic security by supporting projects such as training, coaching, and mentoring through WEConnect, which is the leading certification for small businesses in Canada. We will enable qualified women business owners to participate in economic growth through access to large contract opportunities, which is otherwise known as supplier diversity.

We're helping women to improve their skills, knowledge, and expertise in advanced technology through a project we've partnered with CATAWIT. We're creating opportunities for women industry workers in non-traditional trades to partner with unemployed or under-employed women to get trade and technology jobs in Cape Breton through the Hypatia Association. We are increasing financial literacy and self-employment for young immigrant women in the Windsor and Essex County area through the multicultural council of that region.

Under the pillar of ending violence against women we have supported such projects as UNiTE to End Violence against Women, to help women escape violence and have better access to higher-quality services at women's shelters across the country. A project called Aboriginal Women and Girls: Reclaiming Our Power is helping young aboriginal women and girls in Winnipeg's inner city develop leadership skills, become more aware of healthy relationships, and participate in the schools and communities. We're building opportunity and leadership development for young women to eliminate relationship violence and engage youth in peer processes in New Brunswick to prevent dating violence. These are just a couple of examples of the many projects that are going on.

Under our priority to encourage women's leadership and democratic participation, we have funded such initiatives as Equal Voice to encourage girls and young women to become more actively involved in democratic institutions. We are supporting the Halifax YWCA to increase leadership capacity of at-risk young women in the African Nova Scotian community.

We are also funding and supporting the Women's Worlds forum in 2011. It is a global forum that will connect women of diverse backgrounds from Canada and around the world to prepare them for leadership. The Centre for Development of Women in Governance in Quebec City, to prepare women for key decision-making roles, is also being partnered.

These initiatives demonstrate the positive difference our government is making in the lives of Canadian women and girls. This work will continue, as they are telling us that these initiatives are changing their lives and those of the families in their communities.

• (1545)

In conclusion, our government is committed to equality for women and men, which is not only a human rights issue but a fundamental part of ensuring women contribute fully to the economic, social, and democratic life of Canada. Speaking both as an elected representative and as a woman, I believe equality must be a joint effort shared equally by women and men. We become stronger as a nation when women experience every opportunity possible. Men play a very important role in promoting that equality.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Guergis.

Before you move on, I note that in your opening remarks you mentioned that meeting with the NGOs prior to going to the United Nations and discussing with them the priorities was a precedent. I'm afraid it isn't, Madam Minister.

Hon. Helena Guergis: No, actually, Madam Chair, if I may, I was on the ground at the UN a couple of days prior to the beginning of it. We reached out, established, and held a series of meetings before it began in New York City.

The Chair: That had been done by ministers prior to you, Madam Minister. I just wanted to tell you that.

We're now getting into the question and answer area. For everyone's information, there is going to be a seven-minute round. I'm going to be timing you. Try to make your remarks fit your seven minutes, because that includes the question and the answer.

I would also like to ask the minister if she would also remember that there is a seven-minute timeline here that includes a question and an answer.

I'll begin with the first round, and I begin with Anita Neville.

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

Thank you, Minister, for being here today.

I have a number of questions, so I would appreciate following up on the chair's remarks. If you could keep your answers short as well, I'll try to keep the questions short.

My first question is, are the supplementary estimates any different from last year's supplementary estimates?

Hon. Helena Guergis: I'll ask Suzanne to answer that question.

Ms. Suzanne Clément (Coordinator, Head of Agency, Office of the Coordinator, Status of Women Canada): The main difference in the supplementaries this year would include a re-profiling of \$1 million that had been done two years ago. There had been \$2 million re-profiled, one in 2009-10 and one in 2010-11, so that would be reflected in these supplementaries. There is of course the Sisters in Spirit funding, which terminated on March 31. Then there are technical adjustments, as we get every year from the centre, for employee benefits. There is a transfer to the Atlantic Canada Opportunities—

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

That's my next question, the transfer of \$317,000 to ACOA. Why did this money not come from ACOA or from the arts funding capabilities? Rather, why did it come from Status of Women?

Hon. Helena Guergis: There was a very specific project that we had received an application for where there was significant support from those who were working on preventing domestic violence. They had wanted some significant support for the project and a public awareness strategy that they were going to be implementing on violence against women.

Hon. Anita Neville: It went to an arts organization...from you to ACOA to the arts organization?

Hon. Helena Guergis: We are one of the partners in this public awareness campaign, and we are supporting the work that is directly affiliated with ending violence against women and public awareness.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

Minister, you referenced your trip to New York. The opposition critics were there as part of the IPU delegation. I too met with many of the not-for-profit agencies that were there. While I was there, a representation was made to me by a number of them that was confirmed in a post on a blog from somebody who was there.

I'm going to read you the post and then I have a question. The post on the blog was confirmed in a number of comments I received there. The blogger indicated, and I'm quoting the blogger, "At today's briefing session our minister remembered my name...and then looked me in the eye and said the following", and she is now quoting you:

I was just in a bi-lateral session with Israel, it's where we share practices, and Israel said that they've increased women's access to education and their birthrate is rising too! They have such strong family values there that they don't need a National Daycare plan! Wouldn't it be great to figure out how they're doing that?

She then went on and told a number of other people the same thing.

My question to you is this. Are you saying that those Canadians who use a day care program in this country do not have family values?

• (1550)

Hon. Helena Guergis: I don't really recall that conversation. I had a conversation with so many, and I did actually indicate in the beginning that I had about 20-some meetings in one day with 20 different organizations, so I don't recall this specific conversation. I don't know exactly what you're asking me, but I think what's very clear when it comes to my position and even my own party's position is that we support choice. We respect the choices people make on however they choose to raise their children or whoever they choose to care for their children.

I don't understand your question.

Hon. Anita Neville: My question is fairly clear. It was posted on a blog, but it was reaffirmed to me by many that I met there because they were so startled with it—by the fact that you said it. So it's unfortunate that you can't recall it.

My concern is that there is a representation or a view by this government that if somebody puts a child in day care, they have not got family values, as identified by you.

I'm going to move on to the next question. You've been before the committee a number of times and you've talked about coming up with an action plan for Canadian women. Last May you said your action plan would be coming soon. Nearly a year has gone by. I wonder if you could define "soon" for us.

Hon. Helena Guergis: I actually announced the three pillars of the plan probably about a year ago.

Hon. Anita Neville: That was the plan?

Hon. Helena Guergis: We did restructure the agency substantially. We've had that conversation around the table a number of times. We decided we would put our focus into those grassroots organizations that are best to deliver to the most vulnerable and specific and unique needs of each community. I announced three pillars of focus, and I've discussed them again today: economic security, ending violence against women, and women in leadership and democracy.

What we see now is an increase in the number of grassroots organizations who are in fact receiving funding. It is a 69% increase in the number of grassroots organizations—

Hon. Anita Neville: But there does not to this minute seem to be any plan.

Hon. Helena Guergis: —and 47% of them are receiving funds for the very first time from this government. They are advising us that they very much support the changes that we have made and appreciate that grassroots level of support.

Hon. Anita Neville: Madam Minister, you articulated that there would be a plan coming.

Hon. Helena Guergis: That is the plan.

Hon. Anita Neville: That is the plan? Now I would say—

Hon. Helena Guergis: It is the plan, colleague, and we are implementing it, and of course we did increase the partnership fund as well. We introduced that and the community fund as well. Within those two—

The Chair: Excuse me, there has to be order.

Hon. Helena Guergis: I was trying to answer the question.

The Chair: I think Madam Neville was asking a question. Would you please allow the question to be asked?

I heard everyone deciding that we would all be brief.

Ms. Neville, would you finish your question, and then Minister would you give a brief answer?

Thank you very much.

Yes?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Chair, in the same sense, if the opposition asks a question, to allow the minister to respond is also appropriate.

The Chair: Absolutely. I think we have to find a balance here because we can't go on with long answers that take up the time.

Ms. Neville, ask the question quickly, and, Madam Guergis, Minister, please answer the question quickly.

You have one minute.

Hon. Anita Neville: Minister, you spoke about aboriginal women. You referenced Sisters in Spirit funding. My question to you is twofold. What is happening with Sisters in Spirit funding? Secondly, yesterday I attended in Montreal, and the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal indicated to us that a third of their funding was cut because of the cut in funding to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Was your agency aware of it? Did you advocate on behalf of it? I know that you champion shelters and they do good work. What is happening really for aboriginal women?

Hon. Helena Guergis: As you know, Sisters in Spirit is coming to a close. I continue to work very closely with the Native Women's Association. The next step will begin immediately after March 31, on April 1, and their funding will continue. We are working on what the next five years look like very closely together.

In addition to that, Minister Strahl did answer in the House today specific to that file, with the organization you're speaking with, the residential schools...and the issue of the shelter that you're talking about is not my file. But I think, Ms. Neville, you are aware of the work I have been doing with shelters across the country, supporting the first-time creation of a national shelter network. In fact, when I was at the UN, I was presented with an award from the global shelter network for the work that I have done on domestic violence—

• (1555)

Hon. Anita Neville: But this shelter is being dismantled.

Hon. Helena Guergis: —and within this national organization there is in fact aboriginal representation—

The Chair: I have to call the time now. I'm sorry.

Everyone should really make an effort. I know you are used to making SO 31s in the House. People know how to fit the answer and the question to suit the time. I will not allow time to go over again.

The next person is Monsieur Desnoyers.

[*Translation*]

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

Madam Minister, you stated that several billion dollars had been allocated to women. If we take a closer look at Mr. Flaherty's budget, however, we realize that it does not actually contain anything new for women. Given the economic crisis that they have experienced in recent years, I don't think their needs are being adequately considered. Women were the first ones to feel the effects of this crisis and unfortunately, they are still feeling the effects of it more than anyone else today. In a move to streamline operations, the government is planning to cut all departmental budgets significantly.

Are you going to cut funding to women once again, when they have already endured significant cutbacks? A number of agencies have seen their funding slashed in recent budgets.

Furthermore, Madam Minister, would you agree that we need to invest in social structures if we truly want to see improvements on the employment front? In order for women to really have access to the labour market—and they deserve this as much as men—, they must have access to real daycare services.

There is also nothing in the budget for senior women. As I understand it, you have not made any demands in so far as they are concerned. Last December, however, the Standing Committee on the Status of Women tabled a report on women and pensions to the House of Commons. It contained several proactive recommendations regarding women, and in particular recommendations regarding senior women.

As Minister, do you intend to follow up on these recommendations?

[*English*]

Hon. Helena Guergis: Thank you very much.

As has been said around this table many times, my role as the Minister of State for the Status of Women is to work with all my federal colleagues across government. I play a gender-based analysis function at the table, and I can tell you that of course I was consulted

on a number of the initiatives that are in the budget, and will be as we go forward.

I think it's very important for you to realize and remember that with unemployment right now, it's really difficult for all Canadians when you're in a recession and coming out of a recession. Our government's focus with our economic action plan is to ensure that we can create an atmosphere and an opportunity for all Canadians so that we can come out of this economy in a situation not only faster, but stronger than we were in the beginning.

My goal, of course, is to ensure that women are alongside men. We are almost 52% of the population. I'm sure you would agree with me that there isn't a political party that would ignore 52% of the population. It just wouldn't make any sense.

We always work in the best interest of all Canadians with the economic action plan. I'd like to highlight again that for the first time in Canada's history, 59% of the population...when you look at employment, it's women who outnumber men for the very first time in Canada's history.

I would also like to talk a little bit about the non-traditional trades focus that we have at the agency. We have the highest level of spending at Status of Women Canada in Canada's history, and we are focusing on non-traditional trades and training women in these very particular careers of heavy equipment operators, welders, electricians, you name it. That's what we're working on, and we're seeing some very high success rates, especially for those women who are coming out of very vulnerable situations. We're giving them those opportunities and training.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Madam Minister, we talk about an economic recovery from a numbers standpoint. However, women are still without work. We can continue to talk about access to employment, as you are doing, but the fact remains that women are at a disadvantage. The gender gap still exists today. In terms of gender gap, Canada ranks fifth among OECD countries. Unfortunately, our failure to apply important wage parity legislation only makes this gap more glaring.

As I see it, the budget contains nothing more than pious wishes. Earlier, you spoke of billions of dollars, but you forgot to mention women.

• (1600)

[*English*]

Hon. Helena Guergis: Perhaps I might just cite for you the fact that the World Economic Forum gender gaps report that was released in August highlighted that Canada had improved, that we had risen six spaces, and that we were ahead of the United States. In fact, out of the four categories, specifically economic participation, Canada was a leader. We are in fact closing the gender gap.

We were number one on literacy. We were in the top for educational attainment for women. With respect to women's health, we were in the top. The fourth category, where we need to improve, is democratic participation and seeing women in more leadership roles. That's why our government has made some significant focus on the Canadian municipalities association and other organizations. There are some very good groups in Quebec that we're working with and partnering on in educating young women and increasing their political literacy skills.

So while we do have more work to do, there has been progress. I do think you do have to celebrate that progress and recognize where we have come in order to continue to eliminate the gender gap.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: I see.

[English]

The Chair: You have the floor, Mr. Desnoyers. Go ahead. I'll tell you when you're done.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: I asked you a supplementary question, but you did not answer me. I can also mention the other questions that you have not answered.

I pointed out to you that there is nothing in the current budget for women, in so far as pensions are concerned. The committee worked long and hard on this issue. We heard from witnesses who explained to us that there was a significant gender gap in terms of pensions. We need to remember that women were not in the labour force. The situation isn't much different today because women have lost their jobs. In future, they will encounter a major problem with pensions.

As I said, the committee worked hard to table a report containing a number of recommendations. I asked you if you were prepared to support these recommendations and if you will be asking your fellow ministers to follow up on them so that Canadian women can make advances in this area.

[English]

Hon. Helena Guergis: I can confirm for you that I will continue to work with my senior colleagues, as I always have. And yes, senior women and the issues that we have for them.... We know that the majority of our senior population is senior women, and it is a great concern.

For my part, I cannot speak for the Minister of Finance and his pension plan, sir, and you know that.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Unfortunately, you are not answering the question of whether you intend to support the committee's recommendations.

[English]

The Chair: Order!

Madam Boucher, I am on top of it, thanks.

Will you please allow the minister to answer, Monsieur Desnoyers? Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Again, my question to you is as follows: Will you be supporting the demands, or recommendations of this committee?

[English]

The Chair: The question is clear and the minister will answer it.

You have only another 15 seconds. Thank you.

Hon. Helena Guergis: I have already answered the question.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Boucher.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Good day, Minister. Welcome to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

As you know, we work very hard for the cause of gender equality. The women here today decided one day to enter the political arena. We decided to take on a leadership role. We know, and we have often discussed this in committee, especially when examining the situation of women in non-traditional fields of employment, that women are not as well represented in politics in Canada as we would like. We would like to see many more women enter politics.

Recently, along with the Canadian Federation of Municipalities, you announced funding for projects that encourage women to get involved in politics. You have allocated \$361,265 to the Women in Municipal Government National Program.

Could you tell us more about this announcement and why it is important for women to take on a leadership role at this time?

• (1605)

[English]

Hon. Helena Guergis: It has been identified that the magic number seems to be 30% or three. If you look at Fortune 500 companies, there is a dramatic difference in the return on equity and return on sales between companies that have three women on a board and those that do not. It's been recognized that if you truly want to see change within governments, having 30% is an ideal number. We realize that our federal Parliament is at 22%.

I highlighted the World Economic Forum gender gap report, which had said this was where Canada needed to see some improvement. So what we are doing at the agency as part of our plan for women's equality is to work with elected officials at all levels of government and prepare a mentorship program, to prepare opportunities for young women to be paired up with those who are elected in order to increase their political literacy skills, and to provide training programs and such. I believe the project you're talking about right now is the one I announced on International Women's Day with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and Chair Pam McConnell, who is a fantastic woman who has great experience, as do all on their women's committee. We're doing some great work with them.

In addition to that, I already highlighted Equal Voice, which has \$1.2 million over, I believe, three years to provide them the opportunity to reach out to over 5,000 young women between the ages of 15 and 24 across the country. Of course, this is in the hope that we can see more women elected. I think all of us around the table would agree we would like to see more balance, and I think that would be of benefit to all of us, because then we'll be in those leadership and decision-making roles.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you.

As Parliamentary Secretary for the Status of Women, I had an opportunity recently to meet with a dynamic group of women entrepreneurs from Quebec at a gathering in Gatineau. The new face of women entrepreneurship in Canada was discussed at length. According to a recent CIBC study, over 45% of Canadian SMEs are now owned by women. This study reported that women who opt to go into business do so because, first of all, they want to be in control, and second, they want to better balance work and family responsibilities.

A growing number of women are choosing to become entrepreneurs. As a result of Canada's Economic Action Plan and changes to the employment insurance system, self-employment is now recognized and self-employed women are now entitled to maternity leave.

Can you tell us about the strides that have been made in the area of entrepreneurship and about everything our government has done since taking office to assist agencies that work in the community and in the process, to give young women the power to change things.

[English]

Hon. Helena Guergis: Thank you.

Last year alone, through Status of Women Canada, we provided a total of \$7 million in funding for projects across the country, focused on the economic security pillar. Projects varied from those involving basic business skills for businesses just starting to those involving additional skills for businesses that have been in business for two, three, or four years and that need to further advance and grow.

It is important to recognize that the OECD has cited Canadian businesswomen as being the most entrepreneurial within the developed OECD countries. We, as a government, believe it is important to support that growth, to identify with some of the reasons they go into self-employment, and to support them in their goals. The self-employment act is one of those initiatives that was long overdue, and it's been well received by women who run small businesses across the country. Having access to maternity and paternity benefits and the other benefits that those who are not self-employed have will be of significant benefit, specifically for women, and I've already cited the reasons for that.

• (1610)

The Chair: You have one minute and 30 seconds.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I'll split my time with Cathy.

Merci beaucoup.

The Chair: One minute and 30 seconds, Cathy.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you, Madam Chair.

This is perhaps way too short a time to talk about such an important topic.

Certainly in my community of British Columbia, the missing and murdered aboriginal women are of grave concern, and of course there are many issues in terms of aboriginals' full participation in the economy. Again, this doesn't give an opportunity, but could you briefly talk to that issue, please?

Hon. Helena Guergis: Thank you very much for raising what is a very important issue to all of us around the table. It has been an honour to be working with the Native Women's Association and Sisters in Spirit on the incredible research they have done. For the first time, the throne speech acknowledged the severity of this issue, and then of course our budget followed up with a \$10 million commitment over two years, which my colleague the Minister of Justice will lead on.

What I will say is that I will be working very closely with my colleague, and the Native Women's Association of Canada will be working very closely as well and be a part of the entire process. There is also the community work we will be doing at Status of Women Canada, which is in addition to the \$10 million that was announced.

It's heartbreaking to see. Today you can see a woman who appears to be Caucasian, who is missing, and she'll be all over the news for weeks. But if an aboriginal woman is to go missing, unfortunately it's not reported the same way. Part of the goal of Sisters in Spirit, and one of the main purposes of it, was to create more public awareness of this very serious crime that's being committed.

I think I'll just close quickly by saying that they will continue to be a part of the process and that the incredible research they have done will guide us in our decisions in our next steps.

The Chair: Thank you.

I think we have to be sensitive to the time. We have a seven-minute timeline. I've allowed you to go 30 seconds over in most instances, but in this one we went one minute and 30 seconds over. So I would like to ask again that the minister and others please try to keep their interventions short.

Thank you.

Irene Mathysen.

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

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

I'd like to continue on this discussion in regard to the Sisters in Spirit campaign. There is \$10 million over a two-year period, and you said the Minister of Justice will be the lead. You also used the phrase, essentially, that the government will be using the research of those who did the work for Sisters in Spirit. My concern is—and it seems to me that you've referenced this—in terms of the paternalistic kinds of attitudes that we see in regard to paying more attention to a white woman's disappearance as opposed to an aboriginal woman's disappearance or murder. Sisters in Spirit did extensive research in terms of child welfare, justice, anti-poverty. They spent five years getting the information, and it would seem to me that they have the solutions, that they know what the answers are. You said they would play a part. My concern is that it won't be a leading role. I would like you to clarify this, because it seems to me they should be very much in the lead on this.

Hon. Helena Guergis: With respect to the work they have done on missing and murdered aboriginal women, they will continue to be the lead. They of course cannot lead the work that the Minister of Justice will do on the justice issues and what's required from the federal government, but they will be working very closely and advising him and providing the research they had completed in helping us to guide the decisions that we need to make in going forward and any changes that are required to be made.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: So he will be taking their advice? He will respect that?

Hon. Helena Guergis: Yes, absolutely.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Okay. I'm glad to hear that, because it is of profound concern.

Second, I'd like to ask you about the budget in light of the concerns expressed by the Auditor General in regard to GBA in the 2009 budget. Basically it was that there didn't seem to be a government-wide obligation to undertake GBA, that appropriate documentation was missing, and the Auditor General had some serious concerns. I wonder, has Status of Women taken a look at Budget 2010? Did you do an analysis? To what degree were you involved in putting together that budget to make sure, absolutely sure, that there was a positive impact on women as opposed to what we've seen with the infrastructure program? And I'll get onto that in a moment.

• (1615)

Hon. Helena Guergis: Thank you very much for the opportunity, yet again, to highlight what we have been doing on gender-based analysis. First, as I highlighted in my last visit, I gave direction for our gender-based analysis to be updated to a more modern approach, and that is in the middle of being completed right now.

As a result of the Auditor General, we put together a gender-based analysis action plan, which we submitted—I believe you already have a copy—and it is being implemented.

I did highlight that since we became the government in 2006, we began, for the first time, the process of doing a gender-based analysis on the budget tax measures, and we have done so every year since. In addition, we issued a directive in 2007 that all Treasury Board submissions must provide evidence of gender-based analysis. That is in fact happening.

Then there was a directive, in 2009, that all cabinet submissions must provide evidence that gender-based analysis has been completed. Of course, as the minister dedicated to status of women and the minister responsible for that gender-based function, I challenge at every opportunity, and where appropriate, to ensure that gender-based analysis has in fact been done.

We are living up to our commitments and we are doing a very good job of ensuring that this is being done across government.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Minister. Unfortunately, an analysis of the 2010 budget from external sources again shows that women did not benefit from the budget to the degree they need to.

Madam Chair, as with last year, I wonder whether we could ask the Auditor General to take a look at Budget 2010 with regard to the effectiveness of GBA.

I want to go on to infrastructure. One of the concerns expressed in terms of infrastructure is that women got about \$500,000 of the \$33 billion. That's 0.0006% of infrastructure funding. Minister, what will you do to ensure that women get a share of that infrastructure spending so they can fully participate, as you've indicated they should?

Hon. Helena Guergis: As I have highlighted a number of times, Irene, the thousands of projects that are going on across the country benefit all Canadians—men, women, children, new Canadians, old Canadians—in many aspects. In addition, there is support and funding for a significant number of projects in order to provide women with the opportunity to be trained in those professions. Women deserve those opportunities, just as all Canadians do, and they are excelling in them. I have said many times that the men I have spoken to in the construction industry have said they prefer women to operate some of their machinery, because apparently they're not breaking the equipment.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Minister. That's interesting, but unfortunately, in our study of women in non-traditional jobs this past December, we found that women were still being excluded in large numbers and the opportunities weren't there.

You talked about WEConnect. How does a women entrepreneur get access to the funding you talked about?

• (1620)

Hon. Helena Guergis: She would contact WEConnect, and we would be happy to provide you with that information; I believe it is on our website. They are required to go through a training program. Specifically, this program is the leading certification program for women-owned businesses and solely women-owned businesses. It has been going on in the United States for years. It is in the U.K., and China and India are on the verge of announcing it.

It is a market access program. For those who have a product they would like to sell—for example, one item can cost \$25,000 to place on a grocery store shelf, and if she is successful those fees are waived and she's given an opportunity to market her items. The fees are waived, but what's really important is that it's a database, and there are corporations that have made the commitment to purchase 5% of their new products. In fact there is one woman in my riding—

The Chair: Minister, I'm going to have to ask you to wrap it up.

Hon. Helena Guergis: —who had maple syrup products. It's bringing it down to that grassroots level, with a small business woman who was able to sell her items to a national corporation. Actually we have a couple of women who have highly praised the fact that through this certification process, in fact in this database, they were able to sell their college program to another university—

The Chair: Minister, I'm sorry, I'm going to have to cut you off. You've gone to nine minutes now. That's a very long answer. Perhaps you could try to tailor your answers down a little more so everyone can have an opportunity to do a second round. Thank you.

Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you—

The Chair: In this round, I must tell everyone—in this instance we just went eight minutes and 30 seconds over—we tend to be going well over. With absolutely no prejudice whatsoever, I would like to ask people to shorten their questions, but I would also like the answers to be succinct.

We're now going to a five-minute round and I will only allow a short leeway, or else not everyone will get to answer a question, and as we all know in this committee, that wouldn't be fair, would it?

There you go.

Hon. Anita Neville: So how much time are you telling me I have?

The Chair: I'm giving you five, as you know. Five for questions and answers.

Hon. Anita Neville: My question is a little longer than usual, Madam Chair, so bear with me.

The Chair: You're going to have to deal with it.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

Minister, we know that Canadian women are desperate for something. They're looking for leadership, they're looking for advocacy, and what you've indicated today as what you've provided is an outline. We've been meeting with women's groups, both in Ottawa and across the country, and we've been told that you don't respond to the issues of housing, education, access to education, pay equity, or child care, or a lot of other things. What credibility can you have with Canadian women when you haven't delivered on the one thing you said you would, which is an identifiable, articulated action plan with goals, timelines, players, partners, and projected outcomes?

And Minister, I'm going to say to you that there is an elephant in this room that no one is speaking to. Do you truly believe that you have the credibility to speak to and for the women in this country?

Hon. Helena Guergis: Thank you very much. I have highlighted the action plan that our government did put in place. I am the first

minister who is dedicated to the status of women, and I work proudly alongside all of my colleagues, not only implementing our action plan with the three pillars of focus at the agency, with the increased level in funding to the grassroots organizations: a focus on any violence against women, a focus on women's economic security, and a focus on women and leadership and democracy. I believe in the good work that I have been doing, and I have faith.

To be really honest with you, it's been an honour, and it's a pleasure to work with the number of women that I have across the country, to see first-hand the progress that is being made, by having an opportunity to visit these specific projects, to meet not only with the women who are delivering the work to these women but with those who have reached success as a result of the work that is being done. I have faith in that work. I believe in the work that I'm doing. I've seen it first-hand, and I believe in our government's approach in supporting those grassroots organizations across the country who we believe are best equipped to develop and to deliver to those who are the most vulnerable.

For years we talked about and studied and looked at what needed to be done. When I worked in rape crisis years ago, the statistics on violence against women—then lo and behold, I've become a member of Parliament and they haven't changed. So we've taken a very different approach, and I really do believe in the work that the grassroots organizations are doing and the work our government is doing to support them.

• (1625)

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Minister. I'm not sure you answered my questions, but thank you.

My next question would then be, who is speaking for those who are left behind? Who is speaking for those who are voiceless? Advocacy funding has been cut. There appears to be no advocacy within the government. You've identified a plan—and we were not aware it was a plan; we thought it was priorities, but not a plan as such. But what concerns me is who determines who benefits from your plan and what programs get the funding? Is it you, yourself? Is it a panel? Is it your bureaucrats? We have been hearing about some significant inequities and discrepancies in funding and dollars not allocated.

Hon. Helena Guergis: I would encourage you to be more specific in what you're talking about, but with respect to the grassroots organizations who receive funding, it's the community fund. It is an open call for proposals. All of those applications go to my officials and it is for the officials to decide if they meet the requirements and the terms and conditions. Then they approve and bring them up to me for a recommendation as to what they think I should be supporting and not supporting. I trust my officials and the good work they do, and I accept their recommendations—not without challenge, but I do appreciate the good work they do.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: I'm hearing that the final decision as to who does or does not receive funding is yours. Is that correct?

Hon. Helena Guergis: It's once the officials have brought it to me.

Hon. Anita Neville: And you say yea or nay.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Yes.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

The Chair: Lois Brown is next.

Are you sharing time with Alice?

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Sure.

The Chair: You have five minutes: two and a half for you and two and a half for Alice.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, thank you very much for being here.

As a woman who has come from a self-employment situation, I am very encouraged when I hear us talk about economic security for women. I think it's a priority for us, and I'm very encouraged to hear us putting it forward.

I'd like to quote from the CIBC small business report. It says:

What's more, at an average annual growth rate of 3.3% since 1989, the number of women-run businesses is rising 60% faster than those run by men.

I know you spoke earlier about the WEConnect program. I wonder if you could enhance some of that discussion for the committee.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Thank you very much, Lois.

I was a small business owner and I was raised in a small business family. I followed that up with further education.

Thank you for the opportunity to talk about WEConnect. Through the partnership fund we are in the process of expanding some of the work we're doing to be even more focused on the small business woman. In my mind it's a redefining of small business. You can look at defining it as having sales of \$500,000 a year, or 50 employees and such, but a lot of the small business women I meet with, talk to, and work with have one or two employees and sales that are much lower.

They're looking for an opportunity to better their skills. They're looking for training not only in marketing and sales, but also in accounting, how to run a small business, and how to find that market access. So we are working with WEConnect to add on to what they're doing and redefine small business to ensure that the women who have smaller businesses will have the same opportunities for market access and training.

The businesses can be at all levels. Some need basic financial literacy skills, and others have been in business for five years or longer. There has to be equal opportunity for all, but in my mind the smaller business just starting out has been kind of ignored, and it's usually within the first one to three years that you make or break your business. So that's the focus.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you.

Mrs. Alice Wong (Richmond, CPC): Minister, thank you very much for coming.

You have been involved in the shelter situation. I would like to quote Pat Vargas, a founding partner in the Global Network of Women's Shelters. She said:

Ending violence against women requires concerted action at all levels. The federal government is leading the way through its active support of Uniting to End Violence Against Women, a cross-country project of shelter organizations that will facilitate the national exchange of best practices and allow us to design and establish a national network of women's shelters. We have been working toward this goal for decades.

I'd like you to elaborate on that and explain to the committee how the Status of Women has been involved in this project.

• (1630)

Hon. Helena Guergis: I did my Master's thesis on the global shelter network, and I note that my professor was pleased, because I was really one of the only students who was able to follow through on that project.

When I became the minister, we were able to host, with CIDA, actually, which was a big part of that process, an international conference on the global shelter network. Seventeen countries came to the table to discuss that. Canada was a leader. They indicated that they appreciated the conference that we had also supported and the work of the Alberta shelter network and the work they had done in encouraging that about a year prior to that. I continued on with that work.

Within the agency I spent about a year trying to find representation from each of the provinces and territories, including some representation from the aboriginal community, to see if we could create and work together to have a national voice. When you go abroad, often, Canada and the work and the leadership we do on these files is recognized. They want our knowledge and they want us to transfer that knowledge. We identified that in Canada there was not one national voice to do that. So we worked together, and we've succeeded in doing that. Now they are working on a project—this is the project the agency is specifically supporting—to have all shelters come together to share their best practices.

Years ago—I'll just highlight for you—when I was working on these issues, there were types of violence we would never even have imagined that exist today, new forms of violence that we see all the time, unfortunately. Shelters want the tools, and the best tools, to share best practices for dealing with some of these new forms of violence. Some are culturally based. There is cyber-stalking and some of the newer forms of violence, of course.

They are working together on this project, and I was pleased to be able to be part of that and to be recognized for the work we are doing.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Johanne Deschamps.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Minister, there appears to be very few changes in the theme that you have selected this year for International Women's Day, compared to the theme selected in 2009. The only obvious change is that you have left out the word "leadership". It is rather disturbing to see the word "leadership" left out of your slogan for International Women's Day. Even more disturbing is the fact that on the international front, much of this leadership is being lost.

In 2004, for example, Canada ranked seventh on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index to which you alluded in your statement. Yet, we cannot lose sight of the fact that today, Canada is in 25th position. Furthermore, Canada occupies the 73rd rank on the UN's gender gap index.

If I were the Minister responsible for the Status of Women, I would be very worried about the fact that Canada has taken a major step backward. In my opinion, we must not compare ourselves with those who rank at the bottom of the index. Canada's current ranking is no cause for celebration.

[English]

Hon. Helena Guergis: Thank you very much, Johanne.

I would disagree with you. I think that Canada and Canadian women have made great progress. I think we should celebrate that progress that has been made. We are seen as a leader around the world for a lot of the things we have accomplished.

With respect to the work I do at the agency, the grassroots organizations, many of which are in all provinces across the country, very much support and appreciate the changes we have made, because now they are able to access funding that they were not able to access for many, many years.

I would just say to you that I sure hope you are in support of those grassroots organizations and the funding they receive, because they celebrate the changes we have made at the agency. I'm happy to give you a list of those within Quebec who are receiving funding and a list of those projects so that you can reach out to them to see first-hand, yourself, some of the great progress and the good work being done within the communities.

• (1635)

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: As you know, Minister, I have long supported various organizations that have requested and that have been denied funding under the Women's Program.

Take Quebec agencies, for example. Regarding the 54th meeting of the UN which you attended, we were critical of the fact that Quebec organizations were not represented and that there was no Quebec delegate to liaise with these organizations. This is cause for some concern. I attended, as you did, the 53rd meeting at which Quebec NGOs were strongly represented. However, this year, none was represented.

[English]

Hon. Helena Guergis: Quebec actually was part of the delegation. They were there. Minister St-Pierre was there and participated.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: They were represented?

[English]

Hon. Helena Guergis: Suzanne has just advised me that there were six from Quebec. Yes, they were part of the official delegation.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: You're saying that the NGOs were represented. Correct?

Ms. Suzanne Clément: Yes, several Quebec NGOs participated in the UN meeting. I'm not sure how many exactly, but I know that over 120 Canadian agencies participated.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: If you could give me the names of the agencies, I would appreciate that very much.

[English]

The Chair: Time is up. Could this information that you've asked for be sent later on to the committee? We've got about 30 seconds left, if you wanted to continue with that or ask another question.

Hon. Helena Guergis: I was going to just add quickly, on the title, the slogan that we're using is "Strong Women, Strong Canada, Strong World". You may recall that this was also one of the slogans the UN used, so we picked it up and used it here in Canada because it was well received by women's organizations. It changes every year with respect to what the UN decides their focus will be.

The Chair: Time is up.

Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Minister, you talked at length about increasing the prosperity for women, but we know that if women are going to be free from violence and have that economic security, there has to be affordable housing and there has to be child care. Yet your government has made changes to Status of Women Canada. You ended advocacy, which I would suggest is leadership; you ended funding to the National Association of Women and the Law; you're ending the funding for numerous groups, like CRIAW. There is no child care. In fact, you talked about this tiny little increment in terms of child care benefits. It's \$3.25 a week, \$168 a year, and it doesn't create a single child care space.

All of these things add up to a lack of equity for women. If you're so committed to that equality that you talk about, why have you allowed this systemic attack on women to continue from one budget to the next, and even within your own ministry?

Hon. Helena Guergis: Suzanne will have something to add on one of the organizations you mentioned, but as I explained to you the last time I was here, Irene, any organization can apply to the community fund in a call for proposals. They just have to go with the new terms and conditions that we have in place—

Ms. Irene Mathysen: The problem with the new terms and conditions, Minister, is they can't do their work based on these very limited conditions, and you allowed that, Minister.

• (1640)

Hon. Helena Guergis: There are a number of those organizations who are in fact still receiving funding, Irene—

Ms. Irene Mathysen: You were part of that.

Mrs. Alice Wong: A point of order.

Hon. Helena Guergis: The organizations that you have highlighted are in fact receiving funding and delivering projects in our new way of delivery.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: The National Association of Women and the Law?

Hon. Helena Guergis: When we took the reins—

The Chair: I appreciate that there is some leverage in the questions and answers, and I don't have to have a point of order every two seconds that someone dares to question the minister. So let's just get on with the timing, please.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): A point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Calandra.

Mr. Paul Calandra: I believe that's maybe only the third point of order we've had, or the second point of order. I don't think that's excessive in over an hour. If you would show a bit of respect to your colleagues around the table, I know I would appreciate that. This isn't your committee; it's our committee. I think it's going quite well. People are getting their questions in, and your interpretation of the number of points of order isn't quite necessary, so if you'll just allow the minister and the questions to continue, that would be great. I think on occasion we could do without your comments on what you deem to be appropriate on the use of a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Calandra, are you questioning my chairing of this meeting? If you are, please state so now.

Mr. Paul Calandra: If I could finish my point of order—

The Chair: Mr. Calandra, you are in fact questioning the chair.

Mr. Paul Calandra: If I could finish my point of order—

The Chair: It is taking a long time, Mr. Calandra.

Mr. Paul Calandra: As is typical, you interrupt and you show a lack of respect. What I'm suggesting to you is if one of your colleagues around the table wants to issue a point of order, I would appreciate if you would hear the point of order, as opposed to ignoring it and deciding for yourself what is a valuable point of order or not.

The Chair: Mr. Calandra, that's why I'm the chair, because I make decisions on these things. I've allowed people to run eight and a half minutes, nine minutes, on questions. I think I've shown a lot of respect for my colleagues.

Now would you carry on, please, Ms. Mathysen?

Mr. Paul Calandra: I guess I would prefer, Chair, if you actually listened—

The Chair: Your point of order is over, Mr. Calandra.

Ms. Mathysen, please—

Mr. Paul Calandra: Well, on another point of order, then, Madam Chair, I guess I would prefer that you actually listened to the point of order before making a ruling on it in the future.

The Chair: Mr. Calandra, Ms. Boucher always says “a point of order” when she thinks anyone is taking on the minister. This is the third time she has done it, and it is my duty as chair to keep this on track, please.

Ms. Mathysen, would you continue, please? I'm going to give you some extra time based on the fact that we actually stopped you in the midst of your questioning. Go ahead.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, and thank you, Minister.

I want to get back to this issue of cuts. I made reference to affordable housing. The funding for the housing strategy initiative ends in 2011. A great deal of this money goes to the most vulnerable women. In my city of London, the funding is cut for My Sisters' Place, which looks after the needs of homeless and abused women and women suffering from mental illness. There will be nowhere for these women to get help and support.

How can you say that you are defending women when we still have no national child care strategy, when we still have no affordable housing, when the pitiful amount that is set aside for child care will not even support a child in proper day care? No spaces have been created. How can you defend that?

Hon. Helena Guergis: Thank you, Irene—I mean, Ms. Mathysen. You're asking me to be the lead on all of my colleagues' files, and you do that on a regular basis—

Ms. Irene Mathysen: But you're the Minister for the Status of Women.

Hon. Helena Guergis: —and I'll give you the same answer that I have always given you. My role is a gender-based analysis function. I am the first minister solely dedicated to the status of women in Canada's history. We have the largest percentage of women in cabinet in Canada's history. We have the highest level of funding for Status of Women Canada in Canada's history, and we are working with the grassroots organizations, which again, is not something that has been done in the past as it is today, to the level that it is, to support women in the most vulnerable situations across the country.

With respect to your—

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Yes, and as usual, Minister, your answer isn't at all in keeping with your job to protect the women of this country. You are in a government that is conducting a systematic attack on women and their equality and is not promoting them in the way that they need.

Your answer is simply not adequate. It's simply not sufficient. It may be repetitive, but it's no better than it was the last time.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Thank you, Irene, but I believe I have answered your questions. We have made significant investments in all that you have highlighted and mentioned, and I'm happy to provide all of those for you in a written list. And you know what? It's a little book called Budget 2010, and Budget 2009, and the economic action plan. It's in the best interests of all Canadians, and Canadians include Canadian women, which are 52% of the population.

•(1645)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Is there more time, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: What role will you play in the Prime Minister's G8 maternal and child health initiative, if any, and are you at all concerned by the fact that money for women and children in this country has not appreciably increased in regard to maternal health and child health?

Hon. Helena Guergis: I will play whatever role it is that he is defining for me in this process, happily, and I'm very proud and honoured to be a part of that process.

Let me tell you, at the UN, in addition to the 20 women leaders I met with from the Haitian community, a highlight for me that really brought home how significant the announcement the Prime Minister made and the commitment he made was...there were about 30,000 women, they told me, ready to give birth in Haiti and they had no place to do so; they had no water, no clean building to do this in. I can tell you that when they heard that announcement the Prime Minister had made, it resonated with them and they really understood what he was talking about.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Ms. McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I didn't realize we had some more time with the minister.

The Chair: Excuse me, Ms. McLeod, I'd like to explain that. We had gone so significantly over time, because I allowed nine minutes for certain questions, that we were unable to stop at 4:30 to do the part with Madame Clément. So I think we're going to have to deal

with that at another meeting; otherwise it would not have allowed Ms. Clément, in 15 minutes, to fulfill her part.

So you have five minutes left in the second round and you need to finish that.

Mr. Paul Calandra: I have a point of order, if I can bother the chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Calandra.

Mr. Paul Calandra: I know we have gone over time, and we haven't asked the minister if she can actually stay. I know we're well over time now. Perhaps it would be appropriate to ask the minister if she can actually stay or if she is delaying appointments at her office.

The Chair: That would be fine, if we wish to do that, but it would mean that Ms. McLeod, or in fact the Conservative Party, would miss one of their options at round two. If you wish to miss that option, that would be fine—I think everyone would agree—and we will have to deal with Ms. Clément, but it will not give us the time allotted with Ms. Clément. So you have to make a decision as a committee as to whether you want to continue with the last questioner in this round, who is a Conservative Party member, or you wish to stop now.

Ms. McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I'm pleased to continue.

Again, because we had such little time to talk earlier in terms of the missing aboriginal women and children, I'd really like to hear some additional details from the minister in that area, and also perhaps about issues around the economic pillar and aboriginal women.

Hon. Helena Guergis: I'm not sure of my time. Could someone on staff tell me how many more minutes I have? Will you let me know when?

In addition to the work we've done with the Native Women's Association and Sisters in Spirit, I believe there was an additional \$2 million last year alone in other projects specifically focused on aboriginal women, all in line with the three pillars of economic security, ending violence, etc., and women in leadership. Other than taking you down to the individual project, which I'm happy to do if you would like to have further information, we post them on the website all the time.

It is a very grassroots approach, and of course within the aboriginal community it is led by the community and focused on their priorities. But with respect to Sisters in Spirit and the next steps, I've been working very closely with Madame Corbiere Lavell. The focus for the next five years will be very much on that community-based approach of having real action on the ground, concrete measures to be able to address a lot that has been highlighted and identified as the root causes of the violence. I look forward to doing that.

I can't give you all the details with respect to Minister Nicholson's side at this point and I haven't completely finalized all of mine, but that should be coming within the next few weeks.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Chair, I have one other quick question.

I'd be really pleased to hear some more information about Sisters in Spirit and actually what their mandate has been and what they've been tasked with over the last few years in terms of where they've gone with their research.

•(1650)

Hon. Helena Guergis: To take us back a little, there were six inquiries done in the past on missing and murdered aboriginal women. Sisters in Spirit resulted from those inquiries, as a research project to address some of the recommendations in some of those inquiries. I would think that's probably why you would see NWAC not specifically asking for another inquiry, because the thought is, if you've had six inquiries and Sisters in Spirit was a result, you don't just jump into another inquiry.

They've talked about investigations, they've talked about ideas on next steps, and we're listening very closely to them. It is five years, which comes to an end on March 31, and they have identified a lot of the root causes to the racialized and sexualized violence and have identified gaps within the justice system. There are specific projects that we will work with them on, including my direction to ensure that for those ongoing provincial investigations that exist right now, we will be able to provide an opportunity for NWAC to be at the table to be a part of those investigations, to ensure that the research and the knowledge they have is part of that investigative process.

In addition to that, there is a lot of talk on the database. I know the federal-provincial ministers' meeting had called for significant improvements in that.

I really have to stop at that point.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: That's it, Ms. McLeod?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I believe the minister has to leave now.

The Chair: I think the minister will inform the chair if she has to leave, thank you.

Thank you very much, Minister, for being here.

Hon. Helena Guergis: My assistant has just informed me that it is time for me to go.

The Chair: Good, thank you, because we have just finished the second round.

Thank you very much for being here, Ms. Guergis.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Thank you.

The Chair: I'd like to suspend the committee while the minister leaves.

•(1650)

(Pause)

•(1655)

The Chair: We have, as you well know, pursuant to Standing Orders 110 and 111, the certificate of nomination of Suzanne Clément to the position of coordinator. This was referred to the committee on Thursday, March 4.

As you well know, committees have to respond within 30 days to speak to the particular person on any appointment and to question them with regard to their curriculum vitae, their vision, or whatever. We don't have the time to do that now. We would not do Ms. Clément any justice by just shoving this for five minutes at her. She doesn't get to answer when you ask her a question.

I would like to suggest that we ask Madam Clément to come here at another time. If I recall, the first motion had asked for Madam Clément to come specifically and separately for an hour.

If you would like, we have some places where we can stick this into the business we had set for the future. So we can actually do that, then, if you like, and then we can then bring Ms. Clément back.

Is that okay with you, Madam Clément? You can come if we send a request to you?

Ms. Suzanne Clément: I'm available to stay, if you'd like to do it now, or if you want to do it another time, that's fine.

The Chair: Well, with five minutes left to go, it really is difficult. It's five minutes left, if I'm looking at the clock on the wall, less than five. Oh, sorry, 35 minutes.

Okay, so do you want to do 35 minutes with Madam Clément? Does this committee want to do this? I'm asking you.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Can you give us an idea of the time we have left? Will Mrs. Clément be given the floor? After that, how much time will each party have? We have 30 minutes remaining.

[English]

The Chair: I'm just looking at this. If we do this now, that means, give or take the fact that no round ever seems to take its allotted time, we will only have 35 minutes to deal with this.

Is everyone agreeing that we will only go to one round?

Yes, Michelle, you have something to say?

Mrs. Michelle Simson (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Is there anything that precludes us from finishing up at 5:30 and inviting Suzanne Clément back for another full hour? I mean, is it an either/or situation?

The Chair: No, there is nothing that prevents. It depends on what you want to do, as a committee. I'm just listening to what you want to do.

Yes, Lois.

Ms. Lois Brown: Madam Chair, I have another meeting at 5:30, and I'm sorry, I will have to depart. Is it possible that we can shorten the rounds?

The Chair: It is possible, but everyone has to be in agreement on that.

How does everyone feel about that?

Monsieur Desnoyers.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: I believe we invited her to testify for one hour. As Ms. Simson said, we run the risk of seeing the debate get sidetracked, because she will be asked to answer important questions about her role within Status of Women Canada. In my opinion, we need to give her time, and we also need to give ourselves some time.

[English]

The Chair: Everyone heard what Monsieur Desnoyers had to say. Are there any comments?

Do I sense consensus around this table that you would like her to come back for an hour at some other time? That would mean we end now. Or we could discuss anything to do with timelines and do some in camera work. It is up to you, whatever it is you wish.

Sylvie, you were saying something?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: In any event, I am expected at another committee at 5:30 p.m. So then, I'm in a bit of a bind. I think we should cut things short and at least listen to what she has to say, so that we can move as quickly as possible to questions.

[English]

The Chair: And then come back for another hour another day? Is that what you're saying? All right, if everyone wants to go.

We've now lost much of our time, of the 35 minutes. We have 30 minutes, so that will be six minutes per round.

Then it is my understanding that you wish to have Madam Clément come back for another hour some time. The clerk is showing me there is time to do this on March 29.

I am presenting you the information and I want to hear from you.

Lois.

Ms. Lois Brown: Respectfully, I think we had put aside an hour for her representation, so if we have a half hour now, it would be appropriate that we add another half hour at another time.

• (1700)

The Chair: Please, could I have some response from the rest of the committee?

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I made my suggestion to you, Madam Chair.

In light of the time that the witness will be speaking and the questions that we will have for her, cutting today's meeting short and coming back later will mean that we will lose our train of thought. It would be interesting to hear what the witness has to say as

coordinator and then to proceed to ask our questions, rather than interrupt the proceedings at this time, as scheduled. Some people who have commitments at 5:30 p.m. have to leave to attend other meetings.

I consider the subject closed. You are free to go, Ms. Clément. We will expect you back here at March 29.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[English]

The Chair: I have two suggestions.

Madam Clément, I need to have the committee decide first on this issue.

There are two suggestions here. One group is suggesting that we do this now and come back again at another time. The point is that Madam Clément has a presentation, so that will take up a chunk of it. We will not be able to finish one round unless it's a two-minute round, so to speak, so it wouldn't do justice to anyone.

I understand on this side you suggested we do some now and do some another day, and on this side I'm hearing people suggesting they do it all in one fell swoop on another day. So I need to get a sense of direction from this committee.

Irene?

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Yes, Madam Chair.

I think I would like to do it all at one sitting. Madam Clément has spent time preparing, and the idea was for the committee to get to know her and have the opportunity to have a dialogue. If we chop it up, I can't see that being a productive dialogue.

The Chair: Irene, have you finished?

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: I agree with Ms. Mathysen. The exercise must be a productive one.

[English]

The Chair: Can we come to some agreement on this? We have some disagreement on what we do next, and as we disagree, the clock ticks. So given that Madam Clément has to make a presentation first before we even get into a round....

Sylvie?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I got sidetracked a bit by a telephone call I received.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but because we only have 30 minutes, you asked the witness to return for an additional half hour. Or, it was suggested that we stop now and call the witness back for an hour on March 29. Correct?

Personally, I would prefer to have the witness return for one hour on March 29, if that's possible, if it's better for her...

[English]

The Chair: I think we are getting some kind of a consensus here that most people would prefer to come back and just have Madam Clément once and not have to break up the time—come in once, do a presentation, and then we have some discussion.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: We asked to hear from this witness just once, for one hour.

[English]

The Chair: So do I get a sense this is what we will do and that we can either adjourn the meeting now...or if there is any further discussion in camera that anyone would like to make about future business?

Madam Clément, now I will turn to you and ask, are you available on the 29th of March?

Ms. Suzanne Clément: I will make myself available.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That is solved.

We will meet again on March 29 to meet with Madam Clément, pursuant to Standing Orders 110 and 111, and....

Yes, Ms. Simson.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Are we restricted to one hour, or can we have a whole session with Ms. Clément?

The Chair: There was a motion at the very first meeting we had, and sort of generally at the end of the motion the consensus was it would be one hour. Now, if someone wants to extend that, I am quite prepared. We have until 5:30 if people want to blue-sky on this one.

An hon. member: One hour only.

The Chair: One hour? All right. I'm getting nodding of heads. So it's for one hour on March 29 with Madam Clément.

Thank you very much. Is everybody happy? Is there a motion to adjourn?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: So moved.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thanks, Sylvie.

The meeting is adjourned.

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