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Wednesday, May 26, 2010

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Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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• (1830)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): I will call the meeting to order, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the study of Status of Women Canada's funding decisions.

On April 28 the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women adopted the following motion to study Status of Women Canada's funding. The motion reads:

That the Committee hold a special meeting to examine the manner in which funding is distributed by Status of Women Canada, and in particular, examine the apparent denial of funding to previous Status of Women Canada grant recipients in the 2009 call for submissions; and invite the current and former Ministers of State for the Status of Women, the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, Womanspace Resource Centre, the Pay Equity Coalition, Conseil d'intervention pour l'accès des femmes au travail, and any other witnesses that the committee wishes to invite.

The meeting is therefore to listen to these groups and to what they have to say with regard to funding. I will give each group 10 minutes. I will let you know two minutes before the 10 minutes as to whether you have two minutes left or not. It would be lovely if you didn't have to take all 10 minutes, but we'll give you 10, and then we will go into a question and answer session.

I will begin with the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women.

Ms. Jane Stinson (Coordinator for the FemNorthNet Project, Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women): Thank you very much.

My name is Jane Stinson. Thanks for calling us to appear before you as part of your investigation into why so many long-time women's and feminist organizations, including our own, were denied funding this year by Status of Women Canada.

CRIAW stands for the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, *ou en français*, ICREF, l'Institut canadien de recherches sur les femmes. It began in 1977 to provide a forum for feminist research geared to advancing women's equality. It aimed to produce evidence that would establish just how and where changes needed to be made. Maybe this is called advocacy, but it is also part of our original mandate. CRIAW also sought to bridge the gap or link the research capacity in universities with activists working directly in the community to bring about lasting changes.

For CRIAW, as with many other mature feminist organizations that have been around for over 30 years now, the Status of Women Canada was integral and vital in giving birth to our organization and others. In a special publication on the 20th anniversary of CRIAW,

the president at that time noted that had it not been for the financial support of Status of Women Canada over the years, CRIAW undoubtedly would not exist.

So part of our question is, if Status of Women Canada was so important for the creation and establishment of this national, bilingual, unique feminist organization in Canada, why is it that Status of Women Canada is killing us now? Why did the Minister for the Status of Women this year decide to deny project funding for the first time to so many long-standing feminist organizations? As you know, for some this was a death blow. It occurred because for the past four years we have been feeling the starvation from the changes to the mandate of Status of Women and the funding criteria. I'd argue the starvation actually began even earlier. I believe it was in the mid-nineties when core funding was removed for women's organizations and feminist organizations.

The recent decisions are definitely a problem. They were the *coup de grâce* for some organizations. But the problems are much deeper. Minister Ambrose recently said in a television interview that Status of Women Canada chose to fund newer women's groups rather than older ones, but the significance of these decisions runs much deeper than a choice between new and old. It's part of the mounting evidence that this government does not seem interested in funding programs for women's equality or in funding feminist organizations with a track record of advocacy.

If the problem is one of needing to choose between different organizations, each with laudable projects, then there's not enough money going into the program. More money should go in if the problem is that there are far too many groups applying than money available.

We believe these decisions are more than just choosing new versus old. They're part of the Harper government's policies and actions of systematically killing the women's movement, the feminist movement, in this country and stifling some important voices, especially for the poor and marginalized women in this country. This is the effect of what is happening. Whether or not it's intended, this is the effect.

I'd like to talk a little bit about why it's important to change the funding criteria, to go back and really re-examine it. It's not simply a matter of providing funding to certain groups that were denied. That's important, but it doesn't go far enough. Research and advocacy are important for governments to fund. Research is about discovering new knowledge, new insights, and new perspectives. What feminist research has shown is that the reality for women is often different than that for men. As feminist research has deepened and expanded over the years, it also points out that the reality for different groups of women can be very different. So this nuanced research is important to provide new knowledge and new perspectives where action is needed.

● (1835)

Advocacy also really speaks to, often, lasting and systemic changes. Part of the problem right now with what's going on with Status of Women Canada only funding projects that provide direct services to numbers of women is that it results in band-aid solutions. It doesn't allow for projects that get at deeper, underlying, and systemic change.

Some people will ask, "Why should governments fund advocacy organizations?" They say, "Isn't that about funding groups to criticize government?" But that's missing the point of what advocacy is about. Advocacy calls for solutions to address problems and bring about changes. It just so happens that governments are really key players in that, so governments will often be the target of advocacy because they're important in bringing about change.

I'll just wrap up with a few concluding remarks.

CRIAW was very shocked that our particular project this time was turned down. This was unprecedented. We've never before had a project denied by Status of Women Canada. We certainly changed the nature of our projects to correspond with the new funding criteria. We worked closely with our project officer to try to ensure that what we were submitting would be appropriate and suitable for funding. There was never any indication that what we were doing was problematic. When we learned that other long-term feminist organizations had been denied funding, we became concerned that this was a pattern and that it required deeper investigation.

So we really urge this committee to do so. I hope you can go deeper than this discussion tonight with us. We hope you can delve into and clarify the questions about why long-standing feminist organizations were denied funding this time for the first time ever. Who was funded by Status of Women Canada? I see that they've published the list, but equally important, who was turned down? What kinds of projects are being funded by Status of Women Canada? That is maybe the most important thing to look at, to really fundamentally question and examine what the mandate of Status of Women Canada should be, because it has been so important for feminist organizations in this country. It appears that it now wishes

to kill us off, certainly not to provide any stable funding that would help us grow and be strengthened.

We would like you, please, to call on the government and press this government to change its funding criteria for Status of Women Canada so that it will provide funding for research and advocacy, as it did previously and even before that, to establish core funding again for women's organizations and feminist organizations seeking to advance equality for women, especially the most marginalized. Further, we would really hope that you will call on and press this government to strengthen the mandate of Status of Women Canada so that it will establish programs to foster a vibrant and diverse feminist movement across the country. Part of this would be reopening regional Status of Women committee offices and hiring staff again so that they can work on implementing a renewed and strengthened mandate.

Those are my remarks.

● (1840)

The Chair: That was very good.

Now I'll call on the Conseil d'intervention pour l'accès des femmes au travail. Ms. Beeman.

Ms. Jennifer Beeman (Coordinator, Employment Equity Portfolio and Male-Dominated Occupations, Conseil d'intervention pour l'accès des femmes au travail): Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Thank you for giving us this opportunity to discuss the funding decisions of Status of Women Canada's women's program.

The decisions on what the federal government chooses to fund or refuses to fund are highly significant. They enable groups that have been established through the volunteer efforts of committed members to carry out work judged essential by a community of people. Conversely, they can prevent a mobilized community from carrying out essential work. These decisions reflect the priorities of the government, but more than that, they put the government's priorities into practice.

There are no completely objective funding decisions. The government can support or hinder the work of women's groups across Canada. The government has a myriad of means by which it can help or hinder those groups.

The changes to the women's program since 2006 all hinder the ability of women's groups across Canada from improving the status of Canadian women. The changes are well known: the refusal to fund women's rights advocacy; the requirement to offer direct services with measurable results that are very narrowly defined to women in the community; the requirement of complementary funding from other partners; no fixed date for funding applications, whereby applications can't be planned for and prepared ahead of time; no fixed date for announcing funding decisions, so that despite the fact that the group had to line up committed partners, the group can't plan and is stymied in its ability to move forward; application forms that are written in the most abstruse technocratic jargon ever devised—I've been in research for a long time and have seen a lot of funding forms—opening the funding to all groups, women's only or mixed, private or public, so that the fund is flooded with applications; and the closing of offices, so that the agents are again overwhelmed with work.

No one can be against offering services to women. The needs are great for services of all kinds for many disadvantaged populations across Canada, but by offering only services, the essential work of creating structural changes that concretely improve the status of women is left unfunded.

Some concrete examples of women's rights advocacy that have led to structural changes include, for example, the court cases brought by Action travail des femmes, a Montreal group that was denied funding and is going to close. They brought groundbreaking cases against CN that established what systemic discrimination against women is. CN was ordered to hire, and 25% of new hires in blue-collar jobs had to be women. It was a landmark case.

Action travail des femmes brought the case against the STCUM, the Montreal transit corporation that was found guilty of sexual discrimination. If you now take the metro or a bus in Montreal, women and people of visible minorities are in positions at every level. It is because the doors were forced open by determined women's groups and their fight led to structural change. The diversity of the STM should be the norm in our society, but it's unfortunately not. It's far from the case. Women's groups have to continue to fight for access to good traditional male jobs.

Other examples are the Ontario and Quebec pay equity laws that led to structural changes in wages for workers in primarily female occupations.

In Quebec these improvements can be seen in the statistics on women's wages. The Quebec day care system dramatically increased. It was fought for by women's groups and unions. It dramatically increased the labour market participation of women aged 25 to 45. We now have one of the highest labour market participation rates in Canada for women aged 25 to 45 with children. This represents a major increase in women's economic autonomy and equality, as well as a profound social change.

In other fields, be it fighting violence against women, fighting women's poverty and homelessness, or groups that work to increase the participation of women in politics, all of these groups fight for structural change, in addition to empowering women individually.

In the case of our funding proposal to the women's program, the CIAFT has long received funding, but in 2003 we received funding to develop a training session for non-unionized workers on their right to pay equity. This training session has been so successful that the Quebec pay equity commission has a contract with the CIAFT to continue to offer this session to non-unionized workers. We've had this for the past five years.

In 2006 the CIAFT received funding from Status of Women to develop tools on balancing family and work. We continue to use those tools to date.

The money invested in our groups, because we do long-term work, is well invested and continues to bring changes for women.

● (1845)

In 2009 we submitted a proposal for one of our most important projects to date. We've been working on a province-wide strategy to improve women's access to and maintenance in male-dominated jobs and sectors. We submitted an extensive proposal to develop a training session for women entering male jobs on their rights, how best to defend themselves, and strategies if they get into difficult situations. We also propose to follow a cohort of women who integrate predominantly male workplaces, with the goal of analyzing what facilitates their integration and developing strategies for employers to better integrate women.

This proposal is essential, because while educated women have seen great improvements in their employment situations, women without university diplomas have much greater wage gaps compared to men of the same educational level. They have lower rates of unionization and are often condemned to low-wage, precarious work. Access to blue-collar jobs can represent a major change in their economic and professional status.

Ironically, this committee invited us to present the project we are undertaking—fortunately we have funding from Emploi-Québec—that the Status of Women refused to fund. So you invited us to present a project that Status of Women deemed unworthy.

We need to empower women entering these fields, but our work is much more than that. We work at every level—with women, employers, and all labour market partners—and that includes issues of policy.

What the Status of Women choose to fund is an essential question. They represent what are important to this government, and from the changes made to the women's program it would appear that women's rights are just not important.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will move now to the New Brunswick Coalition for Pay Equity.

Ms. Perron.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Perron (Executive Director, New Brunswick Coalition for Pay Equity): Madam Chair, members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, good evening. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the situation of the New Brunswick Coalition for Pay Equity.

The coalition is a bilingual non-profit organization that promotes pay equity legislation in both public and private sectors. We are involved mainly at the provincial level, but sometimes also at the federal level. We have 81 member organizations and 700 individual members. Our organization was founded in 1998. While our history is shorter than that of our sister organizations, we have still been in existence for 12 years. We receive no core funding from any government. Status of Women Canada is our main source of funding and, according to our files, we have completed seven projects in partnership with this agency since our foundation.

We submitted our last funding request in September 2009. Our project aimed to encourage 4,000 women to participate more fully in democratic and economic life. We were particularly focusing on young women aged 16 and older, immigrant women, first nations women and women who work in a variety of environments. The project would have produced information in both official languages for distribution through working sessions, theatrical presentations, the Internet, etc. on the structure of the labour market, discrimination in the workplace, and the tools available to improve women's salary conditions.

This project would also have strengthened a network of 80 women from 8 groups across the province by providing workshops and leadership tools—education, media, networking—and facilitating the exchange of best practices in English and French. We learned on April 9, 2010 that we would not have funding for this project. The reason given was that many proposals had been submitted and there was not enough money to provide funding for all of them. We understand that resources are limited, but that does not explain why our proposal was refused. We believe that our proposal met the

funding criteria. We have an excellent record of partnership with Status of Women Canada.

In fact, this year, one of our projects was selected as one of the best at the national level for a study on its long-term impact. In addition, the leadership of our organization is all female. Our expertise is recognized by various levels of government, the citizens of New Brunswick, and many stakeholders in the public arena. We also receive considerable support from the general public.

• (1850)

[*English*]

The coalition advocates for proactive pay equity legislation that would follow the recommendations put forward by the 2004 pay equity task force and continues to promote women's economic security.

We will take the opportunity today to question the mid- and long-term effects of the women's community fund funding criteria that were established about three years ago. Unlike in previous programs, advocacy for women's rights is completely excluded from funding. However, advocacy led to significant improvements for Canadian women. Take, for example, the right to vote, the right to maternity leave, or to equal pay for equal work. These rights, acquired through much work, have had a real impact on the lives of millions of Canadian women and could not have been implemented on a case-by-case basis. Who better than women's groups can defend their rights while maintaining those acquired? We deplore that Status of Women Canada's funding is directed not just to women's groups and other stakeholders that advocate for women's equality anymore, but to any non-profit group or even for-profit organizations, with the exception of cooperatives, trade unions, universities, and colleges.

Therefore, although the funds available have increased, they are less accessible to women's groups. These receive no special consideration, even if they were set up by women to meet women's needs. This year, one of the objectives of the women's community fund was “encouraging women's leadership and democratic participation”. We question the fact that under the new eligibility criteria, women's groups are not at the centre of privileged spaces for women's participation in democratic life.

In summary, we are left pondering whether our expertise, our commitment to women's equality, and our recognition by both the government and the general public, as well as our history with Status of Women Canada, have been taken into account in our project's evaluation. We are convinced that these factors confirm our dedication and our ability to continue promoting and strengthening women's rights as well as facilitating their economic participation. We appreciate this occasion to highlight the value of our work for women in Canada. We also see this as an opportunity to propose funding criteria that better meet the needs of women. This is truly the right time for a collective reflection on the ways we can effectively promote women's equality in Canada for future generations—now I'm thinking of my daughter.

Thank you for taking the time to engage in that reflection with our grassroots organizations.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Perron.

Finally, the last witness, Shannon Phillips, of Womanspace Resource Centre.

Ms. Shannon Phillips (Board Chair, Womanspace Resource Centre): Good evening, honourable members. My name is Shannon Phillips. I'm the volunteer chair of the board of directors of Womanspace Resource Centre in Lethbridge, Alberta.

First a little background about Womanspace. Based in Lethbridge, we also serve women from Fort Macleod, Taber, and the aboriginal communities on the Kainai and Pikanii First Nations reserves.

We have been active in southern Alberta for over 25 years. We've been funded by Status of Women since 1985 and have never had an application denied. While Status of Women was our primary source of funding, we have also been funded by various provincial granting programs and enjoy a tremendous amount of support and goodwill in the community.

Depending on the size of the projects we were delivering in the past, we employed between two and five staff. In the wake of our application being denied, we have had to lay off our only long-term employee and retain only two women on part-time contract while we rebuild the organization. I am joined by one of our remaining staff members here today, whose name is Tina Shingoose Fancy.

I'd like to talk first briefly about what Womanspace was doing with Status of Women funds and what we had proposed to do when we were denied funding. The last project we delivered in 2008-09 took place in the context of the change in the ministry's mandate.

Our organization took on those new challenges with gusto and creativity. We had filed income tax returns for low-income women for over a decade and noticed a severe lack of financial information among low-income women. That lack of knowledge led to specific barriers to full participation in society for these women, who, in our community, are also frequently aboriginal.

Our 2008-09 project delivered financial information workshops that removed every possible barrier to participation, including providing a meal, bus tickets, and child care. Women took classes that gave them access to trained financial professionals on subjects such as budgeting, retirement, debt, and understanding savings and investment vehicles such as tax-free savings accounts or RRSPs. We

also provided help opening bank accounts, keeping banking costs down, and accessing appropriate identification. As an aside, many very vulnerable women do not have bank accounts due to not having ID, whether it was lost, stolen or destroyed, often by an abusive partner.

The financial information for the low-income women project was successful beyond anyone's expectations. In 18 months we served 825 women. Financial literacy sessions, help with bank accounts, ID and income tax, and referrals to accessible and non-intimidating financial professionals, turned out to be services that hundreds of women needed.

There were no other services like ours in southern Alberta. We served many women who had recently come from the Kainai and Pikanii reserves. Because about two-thirds of our clients are aboriginal women, we also embarked on a formal partnership with the Opokaa'sin Early Intervention Society, an agency that works with aboriginal families.

Now I'd like to talk a little about the application that was denied. The 2008-09 project provided a great jumping-off point for our next application. The first project did not have direct client service as a funded component, but most women needed one-on-one meetings and non-judgmental advice on financial matters. Therefore, direct services were part of the phase two application. Direct services mean women get advice and help following through with the things they need to do in order to build financial and personal assets.

Phase two also proposed innovative ways to better reach our aboriginal clients. We had planned to teach self-advocacy workshops open to everyone, but keeping in mind specific aspects of aboriginal culture, recognizing that southwest Alberta is the traditional land of the Blackfoot people.

During phase one we saw time and again that our clients had difficulty moving into financial independence because of issues related to advocating for themselves. We had planned to hire an aboriginal coordinator with our phase two funds. We had also planned to help women set up community kitchens in order to address issues related to food security.

Finally, we had hoped to develop a child care manual specific to the Lethbridge community. All of these services were with an eye toward long-term attachment to the workforce and financial independence. None of them will now proceed as planned.

Our relationship with Status of Women is long-standing. We received very positive feedback about our application and were told that it fit the criteria, that the project was sound, innovative, and results oriented, and that the proposed budget was realistic. We were given no indication our application would be denied.

There are in fact consequences for all decisions in life, and political life is no different. I'd like to share with you the consequences of the decision to deny our application. First, it is not outrageous to claim that hundreds of women in southwest Alberta will be affected by this decision. If we served 825 women in 18 months, it is reasonable to assume that in three years, with a broader array of services, we would have directly affected the lives of at least 2,000 women.

• (1855)

The decision to deny our funding application is not without cost. The taxpayer is not saving money with this decision—quite the contrary. An investment of slightly more than \$100,000 a year in Womanspace helps women get control of their lives, stay healthy and out of abusive relationships, and build a brighter long-term future for families and children.

Phase one showed us time and again that when women have even a little information about financial matters, they make better choices. Those better choices come with specific price tags: reduced income support caseloads, reduced health care costs, and reduced costs to the justice system.

Finally, I'd like to briefly turn to the justification for denying Status of Women funds to longstanding women's organizations. I'd like to note with dismay that we, in Lethbridge, were not alone. The Alberta Network of Immigrant Women, which has been funded by Status of Women since 1986, was also denied without warning this spring.

Government has given essentially three justifications. First, government members seem to be putting a premium on funding "new" organizations. While this is not problematic on the face of it, it is clear that there are trade-offs being made, denying old gals like us in favour of "new" organizations, perhaps organizations that do not come with a history of being strong advocates for women. The government's aversion to groups that have a history of outspoken feminism is really the only explanation for this fixation on wanting to fund only new groups, because if the goal in our case is tangible results, organizations that have several decades of experience in a community are better able to deliver specific outcomes and reach target populations. If the goal is accountability, a 25-year track record of responsible use of Status of Women funds should count for something.

The goal is clearly something else. Other explanations have ranged from saying that groups should exhibit more accountability to claiming that government's emphasis is on groups that are less talk and more action. These two explanations are far removed from our reality in rural southern Alberta. It is quite confusing for our volunteers, clients, and partner agencies to hear that an organization that delivers programs that are available nowhere else and that served 825 people in 18 months on a budget of \$150,000 is not taking action or acting accountably.

This is what is most important for everyone to take away from here today. Government can say whatever it likes to justify its decisions, but you must know that those kinds of messages ring hollow to the very vulnerable women we serve. When you are on the verge of homelessness or leaving an abusive relationship or digging yourself out of bankruptcy due to addictions, or whatever the case may be, you don't need a talking point. What you need is non-judgemental financial information and other services that help you build a better life, and that's what has been denied to hundreds of women in southern Alberta as a result of the decision to deny Status of Women funding to Womanspace Resource Centre in Lethbridge.

Thank you.

• (1900)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I'm going to start with the question and answer round. It's a seven-minute round, and that seven minutes includes questions and answers. So if everyone can be succinct with both, that would be helpful and we'll get many more questions coming through.

In this seven-minute round we'll begin with Ms. Neville for the Liberals.

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

Thank you to all of you for coming, some of you from far distances. It is much appreciated. I'm listening almost with disbelief as you describe your realities.

I have just a quick question. All of you were funded from the community fund, is that correct? None were from the partnership fund. They were all community fund....

Ms. Phillips, you spoke about going through the process, working with the bureaucrats, with every expectation that your funding would be approved. I'm wondering if the others could comment. It appears to me that three of the four of you met the criteria as established by the action plan of the previous minister. It strikes me that you met the criteria. What was your experience dealing with the bureaucrats? Did you expect that your funding would be ratified? And when it wasn't, what was the excuse given to you?

Ms. Shannon Phillips: Our experience dealing with Status of Women was overwhelmingly positive. We were told we fit the criteria perfectly. There were no problems with our budget.

What was the last question, Ms. Neville?

Hon. Anita Neville: The reason and—

Ms. Shannon Phillips: Oh, we were given no reason.

Hon. Anita Neville: No reason.

And you, Ms. Perron?

Ms. Johanne Perron: We were under the impression we fit the criteria. We know we fit the criteria because we write based on that. But we didn't have any indication that we wouldn't have any funding, although we were always told it's the minister's decision, not the staff's decision, and it's written in the guidelines. We knew that.

In terms of reasons...first of all, I should say that we expected to have an answer on January 27 and it took until the beginning of April before we got an answer, and the reason we were given was that there were too many applications.

• (1905)

Hon. Anita Neville: Ms. Beeman.

Ms. Jennifer Beeman: We applied to the women's partnership fund, and we met with the regional director afterwards to try to get some answers as to what happened. She said the delimitation between what the provincial government was funding and what the federal government was funding wasn't clear enough, in terms of the timeframe.

We were proposing a complex project. And that's one of the problems in the partnership fund. When you're offering services you're in provincial territory much of the time, and it is difficult, although it was fairly clearly delineated, in our opinion. I don't know...that's the reason we were given.

Hon. Anita Neville: So I misunderstood. You applied to the partnership fund.

Ms. Jennifer Beeman: We were with the partnership fund.

Hon. Anita Neville: My understanding is that the partnership fund still has dollars available.

Ms. Jennifer Beeman: We were told we can reapply next year.

I don't think we have much chance if we do. For some reason I don't.

Hon. Anita Neville: Ms. Stinson, your organization does not fit the criteria, by my understanding.

Ms. Jane Stinson: We definitely developed proposals to fit the criteria. We did submit one previously under the new criteria—the criteria changed four years ago—and we were approved, and that happened.

We then developed a subsequent—like a phase 2—proposal from the one that was, to provide training and materials to help the staff of transition homes or shelters for women seeking refuge from violent situations, to deal with an increasingly diverse population of women. That's what our project was, and we were denied.

We were initially given the same general letter I think everyone got, which was that we couldn't be funded at this time. But we asked for more details on why we were denied and we were told it was too similar to a previous project funded in Alberta. We would argue that our project would be quite different. First, we're a bilingual organization, so we would be doing training and producing training materials in French as well as English. As well, we were going to update a national fact sheet on violence against women, again both in French and English, which had not been done in the other project. And our materials would get a very wide distribution.

Hon. Anita Neville: Do I have time?

The Chair: Yes.

Hon. Anita Neville: This is the pressure cooker of time here.

Ms. Phillips, you spoke to it somewhat, but I would ask you to elaborate—and the others to comment—on what this means for the communities you serve. Without the funding, what happens?

Ms. Shannon Phillips: What happens is that we scramble to meet the gaping hole of need this has left. We had identified an area where we could make a very tangible difference in women's lives and we were doing that work. So we now scramble to continue to do it via fundraising, other very small pots of funding, and those kinds of things. And we move on because we're a group of very resilient women and we intend to reconstitute ourselves and continue to do good work in our community. Our community expects that of us.

That's what has happened. We are leaving no stone unturned in terms of looking for funds. We will reapply to Status of Women, and I hope my appearance here today doesn't jeopardize that application.

Hon. Anita Neville: Me, too.

Ms. Shannon Phillips: But if you want to put a human face on what the need is in our community and the difference we've made in women's lives, I refer you to the brief I submitted. In the last few pages I included letters from organizations with whom we partner and work and refer clients, as well as one of our clients who now has become a peer-to-peer educator in our financial information sessions.

In particular, I'd like to highlight one line from Sharon's letter of support, where she says she used to feel worthless and didn't even know what financial literacy meant. Now she doesn't feel worthless and she knows what it means and can tell other people.

• (1910)

The Chair: That's it. Thank you.

Now we go to Madame Demers from the Bloc Québécois.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you for being here with us this evening.

Ladies, I am going to need your help. I have in front of me a table from the Public Accounts of Canada. The table shows that Status of Women Canada has more money than previously. For the 2005-2006 year, the amount is \$10,977,184, of which \$10,268,852 was used. For 2008-2009, the amount was \$17,550,000, which was used in its entirety. In the area of contributions, an amount of \$6,600,000 was approved, of which \$3,474,197 was used.

My impression is that Status of Women Canada gets a lot of money now. That is a fact. Do you know why it is that its approach has changed all of a sudden? Is it your impression that women have enough equality, that they are sufficiently equal to men and that defending their rights, basic research and lobbying are no longer needed? Could that be the case?

It seems to me that your groups, that have done a very good job, had the support of people working at Status of Women Canada. Am I wrong? Do you work with Status of Women Canada employees? Out of 16 offices, 12 have been closed. Are the employees close to you or a long way from you? Are the people you work with actually Service Canada employees? Could you clarify these things for me?

Ms. Jennifer Beeman: As to the funding and the money available at Status of Women Canada, I know precisely nothing. The officers tell us that they are overloaded, swamped with project applications. Now we have much less contact with them. Beforehand, we got real support in preparing proposals. They made sure that the group met the criteria of the fund. It is quite normal for a funding agency to have requirements. We have no problem with that. The requirements just have to be clear, the dates have to be set, feedback from the fund from which money has been requested has to be clear. When the offices closed, our relationships with the fund changed completely. It is much more difficult.

Ms. Nicole Demers: At what point did you notice a change of philosophy at Status of Women Canada? Perhaps Ms. Phillips or Ms. Perron could reply.

Ms. Johanne Perron: About three or four years ago, they completely changed the funding criteria. They also changed the name of the program. Beforehand, they funded women's groups and those promoting equality for women. Ours was an advocacy program designed to have women's voices heard. But you always have to be careful. The term "lobbying" can seem a little negative, but I feel that it is about public participation. It is the voice of women. I have to emphasize that 700 individual members joined the coalition because they wanted to send a message in one way or the other. Of course, not everyone has the time and the opportunity to meet with their member of Parliament, but some have done so with us on a volunteer basis.

•(1915)

Ms. Nicole Demers: Is it your impression that the groups that have been funded are not doing that kind of work, the basic work, that is? Do you know anything about those groups?

Ms. Johanne Perron: Some good groups have been funded. It is not about knowing whether groups are good or bad. But it is true that work is much more service-oriented. It could be that those groups perhaps make fewer public statements about what they need in order to move their work on women's issues forward and specify the things that they would like the government to do to change things, to bring about systemic change.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Ms. Phillips, do you do service work as well?

Ms. Shannon Phillips: Yes, we do.

[*English*]

Yes. I mean, we sort of rolled with the punches, as it were, with the change in mandate, and we did begin to deliver direct services for women, and we were nevertheless denied.

As to our relationship with Status of Women, we had a regional representative we talked to, and we also had a contact in Ottawa who had worked, I believe, in the Edmonton office before it was closed. Our executive director had been there for 17 years and sort of unearthed her in Ottawa and began dealing with her directly. So we were not dealing with Service Canada. We were dealing with people in Status of Women who we had an established relationship with.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Every time that you proposed and implemented projects previously, was Status of Women Canada satisfied with the results? That question is for all four of you.

Ms. Johanne Perron: I insist on making sure that quite detailed reports are submitted when projects like these are conducted. We do not just submit a report at the end, but at various stages of the project too. We have telephone conversations with the project officers to keep them up to date on what we are doing. It is not like we are forgotten once the money has been handed over.

Ms. Nicole Demers: So what annoys you most? Is it the fact that you worked very hard and got no prior indication that your projects would not be accepted? You went through all the same stages as you did before and, all through the process, you were told that you were most likely going to get some money. At what point was that connection broken, at what point did the money disappear?

[*English*]

The Chair: I would ask our panel to be very quick with answering this, because we're going to run out of time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Ms. Jane Stinson: I was just going to say yes, it was partly that we were denied this time, and it was a total surprise to us. But we were surprised that we were funded after the changes four years ago. So I really do believe there is a deeper issue of the way in which the program is structured and what is given priority for funding.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we go to the next person, Madam Boucher, for the Conservatives.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Good evening, ladies. Welcome to our committee.

As you know, I have been the parliamentary secretary for Status of Women for three years. I have travelled extensively in many parts of Quebec, and even Nunavut, in order to make announcements. No one on the government side has any doubt about the exceptional work you are doing with women. I want you to know that.

Yes, we have changed programs. Yes, we wanted to help women more directly. That is true. This year alone, we had 500 project applications. This is one of the rare times when Status of Women Canada has received so many applications at once.

As I listen to you, I must say that some interesting things occur to me. Your organizations have all received funding from Status of Women Canada previously, as I understand it. So 12, 20 or 25 years ago, you started from nothing and Status of Women Canada helped you. Your organizations have contributed to what women in Canada have become.

Our government has funded 78 projects, at least. As you know, if we had all the money we would like, we could fund everyone, but unfortunately, that is not the case. Now there are criteria dealing with combatting violence against women and providing women with leadership. A whole host of things.

One thing occurs to me, because you have mentioned it a lot. Would you be interested if the Women's Community Fund contributed to a large number of projects, but to a lesser extent? The funding would drop a little in order for us to have more partnerships with other organizations. Would that be of interest to you? Do you find the idea has any merit? Do you have ideas for the new minister, Hon. Rona Ambrose?

We have tried to work a little more with people on the ground. You have done a great job and no one around the table here can overlook the importance of what you have done for women.

We have invested in certain provinces. A year or two ago, I went to Montreal to announce some projects that would not have seen the light of day if we had not changed the criteria. I feel that all the women in Canada should have access to Status of Women Canada programs.

Can you contact us when you have new programs? I have seen you before, madam, but the others have never contacted me. I am the spokesperson, the parliamentary secretary, and I would be happy to work with you. But, just to be clear, you have to help us too. I want to help; we want to help. Yes, we have changed our criteria so that we can work with groups that, in my view, are all relevant when it comes to their work with women.

If the Women's Community Fund could fund more projects with smaller amounts of money and with partners, would that be something we could look at in order to help you?

●(1920)

Ms. Jennifer Beeman: I feel that it would be important first of all to know what the funding criteria are. Who is chosen? A private foundation in Montreal received \$1.5 million in funding over three years, while, for a small project, a really good group gets \$30,000. I am sure that all the funded projects are interesting, but we have to understand your criteria a little better.

Important questions have to be asked. With the new services, funding is project-specific for a period of 18 months or 3 years. You are funding new services through new groups. Do you know if those groups are going to be able to continue providing the services after the 18 months are over? But then there are groups with a longer track record. They have demonstrated their ability to produce returns on investment over several years. The funding is an investment, after all.

That raises some questions. You are about to experience this, with the closure of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, for example. They have created essential services, but there is no more funding with which to deliver them. It is the same thing here. If the situation happens again, it will be serious. There is no doubt that the funded services are real. But what good is that if the funding runs out after 18 months? Expectations of service have been created once more and the group will no longer be in a position to provide them.

●(1925)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: But madam, it is not only new groups that get funding—

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Madam Boucher. Ms. Stinson wanted to answer your first question, and you're basically running out of time. I'm just giving you an extra couple of seconds here.

Ms. Jane Stinson: The question is new and other partners, possibly, but I don't think it's enough. CRIAW was able to turn to a new partner, SSHRC, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, to get a major research grant. Other organizations don't have that option. Where do they go? We've tried for years and we were lucky to get that. We tried for years to find other funding sources. They're very limited. There are a few foundations and a few others.

I also think that if this government is really serious about fighting abuse against women, why aren't you providing more money to women, either through direct transfers to poor women or through the CHST to fund social services—which is where services should be funded, not out of the Status of Women Canada budget—and those sorts of things? How about housing for women? Those funds need to be provided if you're serious about ending abuse against women.

The Chair: Thank you.

You can elaborate as we move on, but I have to keep to the timing. I'm sorry, Ms. Phillips. Maybe you can say what you have to say in the next question you get a chance at.

For the NDP, Ms. Mathyssen.

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

Thank you so much for being here. I appreciate the fact that you have come. I'm going to ask very short questions because I don't like to take up a lot of time with excessive preambles. I'm here to hear what you have to say.

The first question is this. There's been a suggestion from some groups—and they call my office from time to time—that if they're critical of the government, this is a very vindictive government and they fear for their funding. I believe that is a real concern for many. This brings me to the question, why are you here today?

Ms. Shannon Phillips: We are here because we were asked, but not just that. I think we were asked because we've spoken out. We are here to talk about the very real impact that this seemingly extremely arbitrary decision has made in our small community. That is why we are here today.

We honestly felt we had nothing to lose. Status of Women is our primary source of funding, and when we don't have that, we have to scramble to try to meet the needs in our community. We don't have anything to lose by at least pointing out that this was perhaps not a very well thought out decision and that it could potentially be revisited. That's why we're here.

We owe it to the women that we speak up for, that we serve; we owe it to the women's movement in Alberta, which is increasingly small. We don't have a status of women ministry in Alberta; we don't have an advisory council. We are the only province for whom that is the case, so we owe it to the people we represent, to our constituency, just like you have constituencies, to speak out and to stand up. It is our duty in a democracy, and if there is fear of criticism or retribution, well then I guess we'll have to wait for that to come. But I should hope that we rise a little bit above that if we purport to call ourselves a democracy.

Ms. Jane Stinson: Could I answer the question as well?

We're here because our organization's future is at stake, and so are the futures of other feminist organizations in Canada. We want to speak up and speak out and call for a change before feminist organizations are eliminated from any government support in this country.

Ms. Jennifer Beeman: We have the same reasons.

We have the luxury of speaking out; Status of Women is not our primary funding. We are so distressed to see the other groups around us going down. I can't tell you how distressed I am about *Action travail des femmes*, and other incredibly important women's groups have closed their doors or are on the edge of closing their doors. They work with very vulnerable populations, and they do very important work, simultaneously giving services and providing a lot of policy reflection as well. What's going on is really distressing.

• (1930)

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Perron: We are in the same situation. Status of Women Canada is our main source of funding. We have worked hard for 12 years to promote pay equity. A lot of people support us. But we need resources in order for our work to continue. We considered it important to come and talk about our situation and the need to change the funding criteria so that we can do the type of work that reaches a lot of people.

I understand the concern about wanting to reach women in the trenches, but I would like to remind you that our work in defending rights reaches women in the trenches too. Let me give you an example. The work we have done in our province caused the provincial government to begin to set up pay equity programs affecting five groups of women who deliver government-mandated services. These are daycare workers, home care workers, those who work in seniors' homes, group homes or shelters for victims of domestic violence. So this is a pay equity program that will provide more economic stability for about 10,000 women in the province. That is a lot of women, after all. We are not in a position to provide them with higher salaries. But we have succeeded in convincing our government to do what is necessary for salaries to be fairer.

[English]

The Chair: You have about a minute and a half.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: When the field was broadened in terms of allowing for-profit groups and private sector groups to access the funding, I was very concerned. Do any of you have similar concerns?

Ms. Jane Stinson: I think someone else said it so well. It was broadened in the sense that more money was provided, but it was restricted in terms of feminist groups' access to it. Broadening the groups that could apply didn't help us; it provides more competition, I suppose, to feminist groups that are trying to get their money.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: And by consequence to the promotion of women's equality.

Ms. Jane Stinson: Absolutely. It takes a back seat.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Perron: It is also important to remember that groups like ours cannot knock on a number of doors to get funding. Some groups can access funding from several departments, but for others, it is much more difficult. In fact, it conflicts with our mandate.

[English]

Ms. Shannon Phillips: For us it was very alarming that private sector groups and other for-profit organizations were receiving funding when an organization that pays its staff less than a living wage for the hours that we put in to serve low-income women did not get funded.

As far as I know, we had a multi-billion-dollar economic stimulus package in this country for private business; I'm not sure why they also have to knock on the door of Status of Women Canada. It makes very little sense to me, and I know it makes very little sense to the low-income women with whom we work that we can no longer help them with their various issues having to do with financial independence and asset-building, while private sector organizations have gotten funding instead.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Phillips.

I'm going to move into the second round. The second round is a five-minute round, similar to the first one but five minutes instead.

I will begin with Ms. Simson for the Liberals.

Mrs. Michelle Simson (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses. It's been very interesting listening to what has transpired.

I'd like to quickly ask all of you if you were alarmed or in any way tentative.... Was that a recent event? Or was it the fact that three to four years ago the regional offices basically were shut down for Status of Women and then we saw a new mandate change in terms of the actual ministry? Did that set off alarm bells back then, before your funding was actually cut?

• (1935)

Ms. Jennifer Beeman: Yes. In 2006, women's groups starting mobilizing, and that's when groups started going down. The National Association of Women and the Law was one of the first groups. This group was such an important group for analysis of the impact of laws on women. There was nothing like it, and there is nothing like it now. It doesn't exist anymore because of the decisions, so we would—

Mrs. Michelle Simson: You could maybe see a change in ideology.

Ms. Jennifer Beeman: Yes, absolutely.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Absolutely, okay.

We heard from my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, that the shift—and you alluded to this—was that they were looking for direct service, that type of thing. My colleague, Ms. Boucher, said they wanted to help women directly.

I wonder if you have a comment on something that I found ironic. I'm new to the committee, in the past few months, and one of our first orders of business was to approve the estimates for the actual ministry. What I found bizarre, and I think this flies in the face of what's being sold to your groups, is that \$317,000 was carved out of the Status of Women to fund a ballet production. I guess I'm wondering what kind of a service that provides. They said the ballet is going to be on the issue of violence against women, but I fail to see that as a service; it may be an education or awareness issue.

I wonder if any of you would care to comment on that.

Shannon.

Ms. Shannon Phillips: Well, \$317,000 is almost precisely what we asked for, for phase two of our project. We would have served

thousands of women with that in southern Alberta. For us, that is alarming,

What I really want to make sure people take home today is that these decisions have consequences, and they have very serious consequences in southern Alberta for the thousands of women we serve.

We did change our focus to service when the mandate was changed. The reason we did that is because we don't have any alternatives in Alberta. There are very significant problems with women's economic inequality in Alberta. We have some of the highest pay gaps, for example. We have some of the highest levels of poverty among families headed by female lone parents, with 24% of those families living in poverty in Alberta as opposed to 16% nationally. As a result of the recession, our income support caseloads have gone from 27,000 to over 40,000 in a year and a half in Alberta as people exhaust their EI benefits. The recession has hit people hard.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: So your assessment could be that we could actually be looking at a penny-wise, pound foolish decision, because there are economic ramifications for a lot of the women you provide for and advocate for.

Ms. Shannon Phillips: Absolutely. The work of equality is not done.

The Chair: You have 45 seconds in which to ask this question.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Okay. This one is for Ms. Perron.

At the time the economic action plan was announced and it became clear that pay equity was a bargaining chip in a union contract, did your organization become vocal with respect to that particular insert into this action plan?

Ms. Johanne Perron: We did take a position against that particular act because we felt it was weakening the right to pay equity for women. We spoke about it. We would have spoken out no matter what government would have done that.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Did you do that publicly? I don't mean by taking out a radio spot, but publicly.

Ms. Johanne Perron: Yes. We don't have money to put any announcements anywhere, but one of our volunteers, one of our board members, spoke about it at an event.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: If it was the government's view that actually women should just negotiate in contracts, I guess I would have been concerned, if I were in your shoes, that they may view your particular organization as one that was dispensable. Were you a bit concerned about that?

• (1940)

The Chair: I think we're going to have to end here.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Sorry.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you. We can come back to this if we have a third round.

Now I'll go to Ms. McLeod for the Conservatives.

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

First of all, I want to acknowledge the very important thing that Ms. Stinson said about the importance of housing. I have to say, certainly from the economic action plan, in my riding we have enjoyed, especially in partnership with B.C. Housing, many, many transitional beds, support for low-income seniors, and just last week, shelters for women. Either between British Columbia or British Columbia in partnership with the Canadian government, I think we've made some really great strides. I think you're right; it's absolutely critical in terms of housing being one of the social determinants. I presume that's happening in many ridings, but again, I am very pleased with many of the things we've done.

That was just a comment. Next I have just a small preamble and then a question.

Certainly in my pre-political life I was involved in the health care field. I was in a bit of a managerial role, and a bit of a role perhaps like some of you have had in terms of having to write many applications. I got great funding. I had great funding for great projects. At the end of the day, after doing this and struggling with this particular concept of writing grants, getting funding, and seeing programs that were effective, I came to a theory. I came to this theory—and this is just my own personal perspective—that we should be doing grants, and grants should be one time to do a specific project. We should be giving grants that transition from one thing to the next, or we should be providing core funding.

Again, I think that happens everywhere, in everything. So I wonder if there should be a bit of a philosophy shift in terms of how we do these things.

I was terribly frustrated, but I do think there's certainly a role for grants, as I say, for hitting at projects and saying you're trying to get from here to there.

Ms. Shannon Phillips: For us, an enormous amount of time, both paid and unpaid, is taken up writing grants. Yes, for something such as our financial information program, it would seem to me that running that as a project first to see if it would work would be a great idea, and then, because we identified such a need, running it as an ongoing core-funded program that works on the full participation of women in economic life.

I completely agree with that. It certainly would just take the pressure off having to spend so much time doing that and not serving the women you're there to serve.

I share your pain of going through grant application after grant application. It takes time. It's not a terrible exercise; it certainly focuses the organization and focuses the mind. But core funding would be, I believe, the right way to go for Status of Women once a project has proved its worth and demonstrated accountability in other ways, which they are already doing.

Ms. Jane Stinson: If I could add to that, as we said, we really hope this committee can go further than looking at who has received funding and who was denied, and look at these bigger questions of both mandate and nature of funding for Status of Women Canada. It would be an important contribution. To start to reinstitute core funding would make a huge difference.

Ms. Jennifer Beeman: I think what you raised is actually extremely interesting. I would, as everyone else, take it a little farther and look at mandate, and perhaps also funding brackets. Right now, you can be funded for, as I said, \$1.5 million or \$15,000. There are some huge projects funded. If it could be a little bit more clear what is funded under what criteria, timeframes, and requirements, clarifying a lot of the mandate could go very far.

The discussion has to be a little bit larger, but that's very interesting what you raised.

The Chair: You have half a second... I'm sorry, I mean you have half a minute.

Voices: Oh, oh!

• (1945)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I can't do much in half a second, but within half a minute....

Again, I feel your pain in this particular issue. If I had more time I would really like to know whether the actual application process was reasonable and sensible, but I don't have time, so thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

You're bang on; that's great.

Now we're going to go to Monsieur Desnoyers for the Bloc Québécois.

[*Translation*]

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

I am a little flabbergasted with everything I am hearing. You said that the criteria have been changed. Here, it shows: eliminating violence against women, improving economic security and prosperity, encouraging women and girls to take on positions of responsibility and decision-making. Each of you has said that your organizations met those criteria when you submitted your applications.

I am not sure whether someone from the government side can help me to understand what I am having trouble grasping. Normally, when an investment is made, by the government or the private sector, you look for stability and accountability. Now you are being asked what you have done and where you are going. You have been congratulated for doing a great job for all those years. But today, unfortunately, no one is telling you why they have refused to fund your programs.

I want to add that the women's struggle is a fragile thing in our society. I think that everyone around this table is aware of that. If we look at the principal struggles that you have been involved in, we see that they are important ones. We just have to think about women's right to vote; that is important. When I look at the criteria and the work that you have done, I wonder how it all can be completely ignored, all the money that has been spent, all the millions of dollars that have been invested in a number of organizations to get where we are today.

I would like to hear what you have to say, especially about the stability of your programs and the results that have been achieved at the end of the day. Have there been contacts with the department about your programs, have you been criticized, your militancy aside. I know that women have had to struggle; being militant is not a sin, in my opinion, it is normal. But have you done anything untoward in the course of your work?

Ms. Johanne Perron: One thing strikes us, specifically: our expertise does not seem to have been taken into account. We have 10 years' experience, after all. When we started, I think we received \$20,000 in funding in the first year. That was very little. We had to prove that we were capable of doing the job and when we proved it, we got more money. That seems to me to make sense. I am not a businessperson, but it seems logical to me. Now we have built our capacity. We have a network in the province. We have 700 members in 81 member organizations, but our funding has been cut off. We have proved our capacity, but it unfortunately does not seem to have been taken into consideration when projects were evaluated.

[*English*]

Ms. Shannon Phillips: Concerning the application criteria, nowhere in the application does it say that being a new group is part of the funding criteria. If that has become part of the funding criteria, it should be made apparent to everyone asking for money. That was never part of any conversation we had with Status of Women, it is not written anywhere on the application, and it would have been good information to have.

The second point is that we at Womanspace were doing the work that government said is a priority: financial literacy. There is evidently a task force going across the country trying to find ways to teach financial literacy. We were doing it. We were successful at it; we even served 1% of the population in our small town. We reached a lot of people with our model, and we could have reached more, had we been renewed.

The Chair: You have half a minute, Monsieur Desnoyers.

● (1950)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Jennifer Beeman: We have a long history of stability in our organization. As we develop each aspect, we build on it. We move several steps beyond what we have already established each time. At the moment, we are dealing with perhaps the most difficult matter for women in the workplace, becoming integrated into male-dominated occupations.

The first file on my desk was women in construction. That was simple: there weren't any. Just 1.2% of construction workers are female, in spite of the fact that women's levels of training are markedly higher. Proportionally, there are more women trained in construction trades than there are women in construction itself.

We are so far from equality, and these are such good jobs for women below the highest levels of education. They are good union jobs. We will certainly continue to find funding. We thought we had reached perhaps our most important file, but we have received no support from the government. You even consulted us about the matter, but we are getting no funding to do something about it.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. I will now go to the next person.

It is Ms. Mathysen for the NDP.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

When the changes were made to Status of Women Canada in 2006, the minister at the time, Ms. Oda, and the subsequent minister, Ms. Guergis, were very clear that women had achieved equality: we had the Charter of Rights and Freedoms; we had the Constitution; strong women don't need advocates; they certainly don't need pay equity or research; women were capable and strong. But subsequent to that, in this committee we've done a number of investigations and looked at a number of issues—women and pensions, EI, poverty among senior women, real property rights for aboriginal women—and in each instance we turned to the community for their advice and their information. I don't think we could have created the kinds of reports we have done without that wisdom.

I wonder whether Status of Women ever comes to you to ask for advice or input regarding what they're doing—the changes, their new priorities. Have they called you up and asked what you think: we're going to make some changes, and will these changes benefit women?

Ms. Jane Stinson: No, they've not asked us that—at least, in recent years.

Ms. Jennifer Beeman: I think 2006 was the last consultation. Groups in Quebec were consulted; I don't know whether the others were consulted. It was quite an interesting exchange, bringing together all the groups on what the most important issues are. But I think that was 2006. I don't know whether it was before the transition or after.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: One of the things we heard in this committee from the previous Minister for Status of Women was that she made the final decisions; that the funding decisions rested with her. Are there any concerns about that? Do you have any comment in regard to one individual having that kind of power or influence?

Ms. Shannon Phillips: For us, that would be disappointing, if it were the case, because it would mean that 25 years of relationship-building with people who work at Status of Women, of our long record of service among people who have institutional memory of that—all of that—would have been lost, and applications would have been decided upon somewhat arbitrarily. It would be a huge disappointment if that were the case.

However, it still doesn't explain why an application that actually reflects the priorities of the government was denied.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: It seems as though we have an all-or-nothing policy now: either you get all your funding or you get nothing. Has it always been that way? Was there ever a time in the past when Status might say, "We can give you some money, but there's a lot of demand on the funding, and while your project fits the criteria, we can't give you all that you've requested"?

Ms. Shannon Phillips: They have asked us for some revisions in the past, and we have taken less money in the past. Those are conversations that have been held. There was no conversation in this instance.

• (1955)

The Chair: You have one and a half minutes.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: I do have more questions.

I'd like to go back to what's been said, because I think it's important to get it on the record. I know this is rather repetitive, but it concerns me very much, this whole notion that you have to have all these new people in. It seems to me it's very much a one-off, something that is very short term. It feels like busy work rather than substantive work. I wonder if you could once again comment on that.

Ms. Jennifer Beeman: We don't know what's been funded, so we can't judge those. I'm sure there are very good projects.

I have that absolute same concern in terms of the general orientation. Services for 18 months...that group has to show that it can pick that up and continue in some way. We've been doing this for 25 years. It doesn't mean it doesn't change what we do; it evolves. We have new members, things change, we re-analyze, we resubmit, workers change, direction changes, and we evolve. But the meaning of the work...it's so grounded in our membership that we know what the problems are of the women in our respective fields, so we adapt immediately to their needs. It's an absolute concern of ours in terms of what exactly the government is investing in. What's the long-term change and improvement that we're going to see? It's not clear to me.

The Chair: You're out of time, Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Wong for the Conservatives. Do you want to pass, because he's in the next round?

Mrs. Alice Wong (Richmond, CPC): I'll pass my time to Mr. Calandra.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Calandra.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Thank you very much.

I'll just focus on a couple of individuals, because we don't have a lot of time.

Ms. Beeman, with respect to the application process, you mentioned how difficult and convoluted the application is. I think a couple of you, maybe Ms. Phillips, did as well. I wonder if you could, not right now or here, if there's a possibility, provide some input into how it could be made easier. If you have suggestions now, what other advice do you have to make it a much simpler process? One of the things we did hear through the stimulus from our municipal and provincial partners was how much easier the

application was, how quickly they were able to get through it. It always concerns me when the government, no matter who it is, puts in place red tape, which causes things to become even more difficult. It strikes me as a bit ridiculous when you spend more of your time on applications than you do on actually doing work.

That is just as a comment to all of you, if you would have suggestions to do that. I'm a fan of a one-page type of application on the Internet, but that might not be enough.

Ms. Jennifer Beeman: Who do we give this to?

Mr. Paul Calandra: It goes through the chair to us. I would really appreciate getting any suggestions on that front.

I wonder, Ms. Phillips, if I could focus a bit on you. How do you set your priorities, because of demand, when you're looking at the community you service? How is it that you focus down and set the priorities of who you're going to help? What process goes into that? How do you then deal with those areas that you simply just can't afford to help or you can't reach?

Ms. Shannon Phillips: We set the priorities for what we were going to ask for, for phase one, which then led to the phase two application that was denied. We set those priorities by working in the community for 20 years, working with low-income women and advocating on their behalf. It was almost like 20 years of focus grouping on where we saw gaps in service and gaps in full participation in economic life. That's how that project evolved. That's why it was so successful, because we knew that need was there.

We also did focus groups at the beginning of the project to make sure we weren't just telling low-income women what they needed but were actually getting feedback from them. We set the priorities according to the budget of what we could actually deliver with the funds from Status of Women.

The other priority we set was reaching aboriginal people, because we are bordered by two of Canada's largest reserves and we are home to a large number of off-reserve aboriginal people, and they are a priority for us to serve.

• (2000)

Mr. Paul Calandra: Even with the good work that you've been doing, which you've outlined, it must be a little frustrating, because there are always going to be organizations that aren't getting funded, or groups that have good ideas, even throughout all the years that all of you were being funded. It must have been somewhat frustrating when there were a lot of other groups that aren't getting the funding, and they have good ideas. What kind of advice can you give them in order to handle that?

One of the dilemmas we have here right now was actually alluded to yesterday as one of the lead-off questions during question period, and today, if I'm not mistaken, by the leader of the opposition. This was the large deficit the economic downturn has created. The leader of the opposition said he believes it's an absolute priority that we tackle that deficit immediately.

One of the things we struggle with is how we can manage the resources we have, to make sure we get the most out of what we're getting. I look at some of the Alberta groups. These are some of the groups that received funding: the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters; the Canadian Mental Health Association; Changing Together, a centre for immigrant women; the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers; Immigrant Services Calgary; the United Cultures of Canada Association; and the Westlock Women's Association. All of these, I would think, are very good organizations doing good work, like you; some perhaps not as experienced as you, but all, I'd submit, probably very worthy of doing this. How, in the context of everything that Canada is facing, do we balance the need to get on the ground to do things, tackle the deficit, as has been suggested by the leader of the opposition, and something that obviously we want to look at? Who on a list like this would we then say to, "Sorry, we have to move you out in order to move another group in"?

Lastly, does it not stand to reason—I could be wrong—that because you are so experienced, you have the ability to actually move forward and overcome some of the changes in funding so that you can create some of the fundraising avenues? You've created a lot of connections over the years that others might not, so after all this time—

The Chair: Wrap it up, please.

Mr. Paul Calandra: I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: Ms. Phillips, we are now over time on this round, significantly, but I will allow you to answer the question as quickly as you can.

Ms. Shannon Phillips: I'll try to do it quickly.

To this notion that we have an ability to move forward, well, we have a great deal of support in the community, but there are no other avenues of funding.

As to the Alberta women's groups and other groups—because Mental Health is not a women's group, but they did receive funding—there has been no regional representation here because there's no one in southern Alberta, south of Calgary, who has been funded.

As to the application process, I would happily give input on that.

As for deficits, things like financial literacy and economic participation for women are things that OECD countries are investing in. There was just a very recent G-20 labour ministers' committee report indicating that investment in things like financial literacy and training are things that are actually going to move states out of deficit situations, and they should not be areas of cuts.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Phillips.

That was a seven-minute piece. Thank you.

Ms. Neville now, for another five-minute round.

I just want to tell the committee that we started at 6:30 because of the vote. This was meant to be a two-hour special meeting, so we now have another 24 minutes to go. So we have another round, and there's going to be one, two, three, four, five...I think we'd better do a three-minute round here, to allow everyone to get an opportunity, because everyone goes over.

Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to ask some more questions.

There are two questions I'm going to put out there. Ms. Mathysen raised the issue of consultation. The previous minister advised me that she was consulting widely in establishing her action plan. I assume that none of you was consulted. My question is, do you know of anyone who was consulted? That's my first question. You're shaking your heads.

Secondly, I wonder if you—and some of you have touched on it—could explain what having capacity means, what it means for your organization, what it means for funding organizations.

In three minutes or less....

• (2005)

Ms. Jane Stinson: First, we were not consulted, and I don't know of anyone else who was. I actually find it easier to answer the reverse: what does it mean not to have capacity? It's easier because that's what we've been experiencing in the last while. It's just so hard to do anything. We've had to lay off staff, reduce things. We can't produce fact sheets. We can barely have a face-to-face board meeting.

Hon. Anita Neville: Can you talk about capacity that comes from being out there and having experience? What does that mean in terms of your ability?

Ms. Jennifer Beeman: We love giving our pay equity training session because we go out into the regions—I was the one who was lucky to set it up—and you meet secretaries out in regions in Quebec who are earning \$11 an hour and who know something's wrong in the small business they're in. Through their questions, when they finally understand what pay equity is, they say things like, "The mechanic is earning this, and maybe I should be earning more than \$11 an hour. My work is so much more than being a receptionist. I'm meeting clients, dealing with the database and all of this stuff, doing accounts receivable. My economic worth is much more than I realized." You see their eyes open.

By doing this, we get so much information from what women's economic reality is across Quebec. It just feeds our work in a concrete way, in terms of us being better equipped to then answer them and give them even better information and tools, and answer their needs more satisfactorily. But it also equips us in terms of our policy analysis, in terms of knowing what the needs are of women who are out there, just how precarious their jobs are, and just how little choice they have. Hopefully, that's where a lot of the work is grounded and where our capacity is coming from.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Brown for the Conservatives.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Ladies, I apologize that I wasn't here for the presentations you made. I was in another committee meeting doing clause-by-clause of a piece of legislation. I'm afraid that takes priority, so my apologies.

Ms. Phillips, I want to ask you a question, but I want to tell you a story first.

I have two women's organizations that function in my riding. One is an organization that is totally dependent on funding from sources at municipal, regional, and provincial government levels. Now they've started to understand that they have to reach out and do some additional fundraising because there isn't enough money in the regional pot or in the provincial pot to give them what they've had in the past. So they're reaching out to organizations that are non-profit organizations in our area. They've come to the Lions Club. I'm an executive member of the Lions Club in the area. We do enormous amounts of fundraising, and much of that money has gone in a donation to the women's organization. They have constraints put on them in what they can do, because they are limited by, I suppose, the ethics of the region, or the municipality or by the province.

The second women's organization that's in my town is enormously successful, in fact to the point where last year the woman who was the executive director did a fundraiser for another women's organization that is just outside of my riding—actually, in Paul Calandra's riding—and donated to them \$35,000. She has made an enormous number of connections. She's got a connection with the Bay and accounting organizations in the area. What I'm saying is that she's so successful that she's giving money away. She takes absolutely no government money whatsoever from any level of government. I look at what she's been able to accomplish with the structure she's put in place. She's national.

My question, Ms. Phillips, if I may, Madam Chair, is about the comment you made about the application process, that there was nothing in it that said new money. In 25 years, was there ever any indication that money that came from Status of Women was coming in perpetuity? Is there not an opportunity, or should there not be some fairness in the process, whereby new organizations can apply because they've got good ideas that need seed money to get started?

• (2010)

The Chair: If you need an answer, we have 15 seconds.

Ms. Shannon Phillips: There's nothing that precludes new organizations from applying; however, when old organizations fit the criteria, they should also be funded.

As to the anecdote, I do not think it's fair to paint us as authors of our own demise. We have done many fundraisers. We have relationships with the credit unions. We have relationships with the service clubs, with the private sector, with aboriginal organizations, and with the municipality. So we are a longstanding group that has done that work in our community. We are not a charity, so we don't get the big dollar donations for which people get tax writeoffs. However, we have done that work of being embedded in our community and we will continue to do it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Demers from the Bloc, you have three minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Phillips, you surprised me with your answer to Mr. Calandra that the mental health group was not a women's group. I am looking at the list of groups that have received funding and I see that some of them are not women's groups. I see the Association acadienne et francophone des aînées et aînés du Nouveau-Brunswick, for example. I do not know how many other cases like that there are. I would like to know which foundation received a million dollars.

Do you not find it a little bit strange that private concerns, in addition to being eligible for tax deductions, can get grants that should go to women's groups in order, you would think, to help women? I have a hard time understanding that. The seniors should have received assistance from the New Horizons for Seniors program, not from Status of Women Canada. Can you provide me with any information about that?

Ms. Johanne Perron: It is a good project, though. It is not that it is not a good project, but there are other sources of funding. Already established groups who have started a job and who want to finish it have been denied funding. That needs to be looked at again.

I think that it is important to let new groups in. In a way, we were a new group because we are relatively young compared with the groups here. But groups did not get in willy-nilly. We had to establish our credentials and establish a partnership. The government told us that we were its partner. When you have a partner, you do not say, three months after the deadline, that there is not going to be any funding. The relationship has to be a little fairer than that.

[*English*]

Ms. Shannon Phillips: I'm sure mental health is doing wonderful work. They are not a women's organization, but nobody is saying that new organizations shouldn't qualify. What we are saying is that 25 years of accountable use of Status of Women funds and successful completion of projects should count for something.

Ms. Jane Stinson: I think government does need to look at how social needs are being met in this country. There are many programs where more money should be going, and groups that should be getting money from other sources shouldn't have to come to Status of Women Canada. There's no doubt there are huge needs to provide services and meet the needs of the population, but the government should be funding many programs to do that.

The Chair: You have actually 10 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: What about this foundation and its million dollars?

Ms. Jennifer Beeman: It is on the list. It is public information that I got from a Status of Women Canada news release. The foundation has a wonderful program, but I forget the name. The information is public. It has to do with working with young girls who are victims of sexual abuse. There is no problem, it is a wonderful program. But why such a large amount from a limited fund? The same money could have funded 10 groups. It raises questions about the fairness of the decisions.

•(2015)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you. That's it. I'm sorry, Madam Demers. Three minutes is a short time.

Ms. Mathysen for the NDP.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

This comes from Ms. Brown's question. She talked about the Lions Club funding a project and that there could be restrictions that were connected to their perspective there, their ethical outlook, or whatever. I wonder if you have faced any of that in terms of your community fundraising—someone who says, “Oh, no, you might be funding something I don't approve of or supporting something I don't like as an organization.”

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Perron: We are working to promote pay equity. So we cannot expect to get funding from most employers. It is quite difficult to approach them. We have asked to meet employers. Sometimes, it is interesting and positive; other times, it is interesting, but not so positive. I do not think that we are going to find funding from employers easily, given that we are promoting pay equity, equal pay for equal work. For employers, of course, the fewer restrictions there are, the less money they have to spend and the better they like it.

[*English*]

Ms. Shannon Phillips: We've never faced any of those kinds of restrictions. We are pretty roundly viewed as a fairly credible voice in the community, and we've demonstrated to the community accountability in using funds and direct results.

Ms. Jane Stinson: One of the restrictions we've faced is from foundations. We've tried to find funding from foundations, and again, foundations are very specific in what they'll fund. Our programs and what we're trying to do didn't fit into their criteria, so at both an individual and an institutional level you can encounter problems.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Jennifer Beeman: Our funding is diversified; it comes from several sources. We have never been funded by our provincial funding agencies—never.

Ms. Johanne Perron: I think that is the case in most provinces. Provincial governments do not fund all the groups involved in defending rights, for example, or even groups that do the same kind of work as we used to do with Status of Women Canada: equipping women to better understand how to achieve pay equity.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Canada has fallen from 7th to 25th place in terms of our international reputation regarding the promotion of gender equality. Is it because we've lost advocacy and research and the things that women and organizations depended on?

Ms. Jane Stinson: Yes, that would be one reason.

Ms. Jennifer Beeman: There is also a belief that we can't go backwards when in fact we can. We've seen fields in which there is a declining number of women. In computer science, for very complicated reasons, there are fewer and fewer women. In 1991, a third of the students in computer science were women, and now it's down to under 20%. We have to look at how we can go backwards in a field that is going to be so important.

There is a very limited understanding of where women are in our society.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Beeman.

Now we will go to Ms. Wong for the Conservatives.

Mrs. Alice Wong: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you for coming.

We have come to the point of starting to talk about why other organizations are getting the funding, so it is really unfair that we are not able to have those people here to tell us why they think they got the funding.

We also discussed the fact that it seems we look at the names of associations or agencies that get the money and say these are not women's groups, but we are now looking at projects that help women. For example, if there is a seniors group that is helping senior women, I don't know why Status of Women should not fund them. Similarly, with immigrant societies, where they also work specifically on a project—and not a whole society—aimed at helping immigrant women, it makes sense to me that Status of Women should really fund that.

There are lines where you approach different funding organizations. For example, a youth group in my riding got New Horizons money. I was surprised at the beginning, but they explained to me that their purpose is to get seniors out and have youth help them. That makes sense to me that it is a seniors program.

I stress again and again, without those people, who have excellent ideas, coming before us to tell us why they deserve the funding, we don't have the whole picture.

I'd like to ask a question. Have you tried again? Are you ready or prepared to try again? If you know the criteria and you have the ability to communicate with the ministry...have you tried again? Did you reapply?

• (2020)

Ms. Jane Stinson: We can't reapply quite yet.

Ms. Shannon Phillips: There's no call for proposals.

Ms. Jane Stinson: No. You have to wait at least a year. God knows, maybe it will be longer, and yes, we are trying to meet with the representatives of Status of Women Canada to talk about the need for funding. Absolutely.

Mrs. Alice Wong: I agree that social housing is an issue, and I'm glad to tell you that in my riding there will be a big funding announcement for social housing. A lot of low-income women will be there. You know, funding can happen within different ministries. That's one area.

Also, I want to keep the record straight: Healing Foundation funding is not cut. It's just probably that the whole job has been transferred to Health Canada, and again I mention that project-based funding is how funding is done right now. Saying that violence against women does not deserve as much funding is having one group of women against another group of women. That's my approach.

The Chair: I think we have finished that round, and we have six minutes left. Normally I don't ask questions as a chair, but I believe I would like to take a round and ask some questions. I'm asking questions because I'm extremely interested in this issue. I was Secretary of State for Status of Women for over six years and I well understand the problems of distributing a small amount of funds among many people.

I hear you saying that there have to be clear criteria. When I was minister, I did not intervene in funding decisions. The department chose, based on clear, objective criteria. The only time I intervened as a minister was when I was asked to look at whether a certain unfunded group deserved funding, because although they were outside the criteria, they were doing particularly good work.

So I think I hear a lot of the things you're saying about criteria. I understand too that there is a need to bring on new groups that are coming in, and I would like to hear your response to this idea. I understand this need. There are some people who are working in small areas where they've never had any funding before. I'd like to hear how you think those groups could be helped. I know Ms. Beeman or Ms. Stinson suggested different envelopes of funding, perhaps giving one to start-up groups, seeing how they work, and maybe then giving them core funding or long-term funding in a particular way. I'd like to hear how you feel we can help emerging

groups that are dealing with emerging problems in specific regions that have now been shown to have those problems.

The final question I'd like to ask is about something that I know you've mentioned.

When I was minister, it was really important for me to hear from regional offices. There were regional offices across this country. The regional executive directors knew the groups and knew what was going on in the regions. They understood. They had worked with these groups. They had developed a sense of whether the groups delivered or not, but they also knew where problem areas could pop up suddenly. I always say that they were the people who really knew which groups needed funding.

What do you think about the need to reopen regional offices? Do you believe that it would really help funding?

Ms. Jane Stinson: I will just say briefly that it's there in our remarks. We think it's extremely important for the reasons that you've mentioned.

Ms. Jennifer Beeman: We've seen it. The loss of expertise from the closing of the regional offices was huge. When you met with either the director or your agent at Status of Women, they knew the territory. There was a team, and they knew everything that was going on. They were on top of things and knew both emerging problems and emerging groups at the same time. The loss of expertise was just huge, and we can see it in our relationship to Status of Women.

Emerging groups absolutely have to be funded, and I don't want there to be any misunderstanding in terms of questioning the decisions made versus the services that have been funded. The need for services is overwhelming; clearly that is not the question. The question is whether this funding is going to be used for groups that may not have a clear, long-term interest in promoting the status of women. It can be something that can be cut from those groups, but it cannot be cut from our missions.

That's the difference that we see. You will always have that problem of funding distribution, but the criteria have to be much clearer for us, and the question of rights advocacy is big.

• (2025)

Ms. Shannon Phillips: On the whole notion that there are more groups, so there are constraints on funding, I might suggest you stop funding for-profit groups and the private sector through Status of Women, and find the money that way to re-distribute to the new groups that ask for it.

The Chair: We have never funded for-profit groups.

Ms. Shannon Phillips: I meant that “one” might want to consider doing that.

On the closure of regional offices, I believe that is a problem in particular. If so many new groups are getting funding, without that one-on-one kind of contact with a regional office, making sure that projects are on task, you may run into problems of less accountability, which runs contrary to the government's stated aims.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Perron.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Perron: I would just like to repeat that we are not against new groups obtaining funding, or against new projects. The projects are valid; that is not the problem. What we are against is that this is being done on the backs of the groups that are already in place. In the past, when groups were in danger of losing their funding, the process sometimes extended over several years, because

they were given a chance to adjust. As I understand it, if they did not adjust after a certain time, the funding was withdrawn. But we had no prior indication that we were going to lose our funding.

It is true that our relationship with the staff in the regions is important and the one we know best. Unfortunately, the minister does not come to our regions very often, and we understand that she does not have the time to do so. The staff in the regional offices are the ones who really know the groups.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to thank you all for coming and spending such a very long time with us. It's tiring for all of us, late at night. It's hot to spend two hours, but you did shed a lot of light and give us a lot of ideas for recommendations on funding, if we see fit to do so.

Thank you so very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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