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Chair

Ms. Marilyn Gladu

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

[Translation]

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

I'd also like to welcome Sean Fraser, who is here representing all of the men in the country.

[English]

I just wanted to take the opportunity to say that today we're beginning the work of the committee. I'm looking forward to exciting things. We can do important things for the women of Canada, and I think this team has great energy to do them.

[Translation]

If you'd like to ask questions in French, that's fine with me. I will try to answer in French.

[English]

We're pleased with the agenda today.

I would first like to welcome Meena Ballantyne, who is the head of Status of Women Canada.

For those of you who are new, the work of the status of women department is completely separate from the work the committee does. As background for us to start thinking about what we want the committee to work on, we've invited Meena to come here with her team to talk about what their department is doing.

Meena, welcome, and I invite you to introduce your team to us.

Ms. Meena Ballantyne (Head of Agency, Status of Women Canada): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

It's a real pleasure to be here with you. I know the committee is just getting going, so it's a real privilege to be able to come and tell you a little bit about what we do at Status of Women Canada.

As you said, we're the agency in the bureaucracy that supports Minister Hajdu, who is the Status of Women minister. You'll be hearing from her next week.

I have the pleasure of having my entire management team here, which just shows you what a small but very mighty agency we are.

I have Linda Savoie, who is the director general for women's programs and regional operations. You'll be hearing more about these later. I also have Nanci-Jean Waugh, who is the director general of communications; Justine Akman, who is the director general of policy and external relations; and Anik Lapointe, who is the director of corporate services and our CFO, and who makes sure that we are kept in line.

This is our management team.

[Translation]

Most of my presentation will be in English, but we would be happy to answer any questions you have in the language of your choice.

[English]

I know that I have 10 minutes, so I'm going to whip through this presentation. I hope everybody has a copy. I know that we're trying to go paperless here, as Andrew has said, and next time we'll make sure that we're ready to project and make those presentations.

Status of Women Canada was created 40 years ago, and I want to take a minute to talk about the situation of women in Canada and just give you an overview. I'll start on page 1 of the deck.

As you all know, women are excelling in education in Canada. Seventy-five per cent of working-age women have some kind of post-secondary credentials. We have more women than ever before who are employed, with 48% of them in the workforce. Women are also making gains, albeit slowly, in leadership roles, elected office, the private sector, and the public sector. There's a lot more work to be done, but at least we're moving in the right direction.

On violence, which is a huge issue, the only so-called positive thing we can say is that we're starting to get an increased appreciation of the social and economic costs of violence. There is really good data out on that, and we'll talk a bit about that later.

As the two little blue boxes on that page show you, there is an economic imperative to get more women participating fully in Canada's society, whether it's in the social, economic, or political sphere. There are a lot of benefits to that, and there's a lot of economic argument coming out as to why not having them participating fully just doesn't make sense, not only socially or from a public policy perspective, but also fiscally, in terms of the contribution women can make to Canada's economy.

We'll go to page 2. Those are the positive things, so what are the challenges that remain? First and foremost is the wage gap. Women in this country in 2016 still continue to earn less than men. Why they earn less than men and what some of the factors are make up a hugely complex issue. Whether you look at the gender wage gap on an hourly rate basis or an annual rate basis, whether you look at full-time, part-time, and seasonal work, the bottom line, no matter which way you cut it, is that there is a gender wage gap in this country. That has been affecting our international standings as well, which you will see a little later.

Women also do a lot more of the unpaid work than men, including child care, senior care, and caring for the sick. More women are in part-time jobs, and almost 38% of women who are working part-time aren't doing it out of choice. It's not because they want the flexibility, but because they have to work, and these are the only jobs that they're working at.

Women are also facing barriers in key leadership positions and in elected office, even though 26% of this Parliament is made up of women who have been elected. That's progress, but it's still under the 30% that the United Nations says is needed. It says that there needs to be at least 30% women around any table for them to have influence.

We're at 26% in Parliament, while in the private sector—again, the numbers range—it's 17% to 20%. It is growing very slowly in terms of private sector boards. In the GIC appointments in the public sector, it's a little better, at around 34%, but there's a lot more work to be done. Of course, as you know, with this government, half of the members of cabinet—this is history—are women, and that's huge in terms of the symbolism and the leadership that is now percolating in these various sectors.

• (1535)

In spite of these gains in education and employment and leadership positions, women continue to be the victims of spousal and sexual violence. Women represent 80% of police-reported intimate partner violence, and aboriginal women and girls are much more vulnerable. So are immigrant women and women who are seniors and women with disabilities. There is lots of data out there that we need to do a lot more work as a country on violence against women.

As I said earlier, Canada has been losing ground internationally. A lot of these indices have come out. It's primarily because of the gender wage gap and the lack of gender balance in democratic institutions. That's where we're losing ground.

The mandate, on page 3 of our Status of Women Canada document, hasn't changed for the last 40 years, since 1976. I think that you would agree with us that we still need an agency devoted solely to women's issues because even with this agency doing great work for 40 years, a lot more remains to be done. The mandate is broad enough to be able to include virtually anything. Does the mandate of this agency need changing? Our view is that coordinating policy with respect to status of women and administering related programs is broad enough.

We are the lead on gender issues, but we don't have the levers. They are with other departments, so we work with a lot of other

departments, which have the actual levers to effect change on gender equality.

What do we do? On page 4, you can see that we have three key roles. First is providing expert advice on issues to other departments within the federal government and internationally. Second is providing financial support so we can try to break down some of the barriers to equality. The third is raising awareness of the opportunities and challenges that women face.

On providing strategic policy advice, page 5, there are three themes. The three priority areas that this agency's been working on are violence against women and girls, with a focus on murdered and missing indigenous women; women's economic security and prosperity, looking at why women are in the lower-paying sectors and why they are not in the non-traditional or skilled trades, which are very male-dominated, in that 95% of skilled tradespeople are male; and women's leadership and democratic participation, where we're trying to push gender parity or increase the number of women on boards in both the private and public sector.

We also advise other federal departments on other issues, such as human trafficking and cyberviolence. With some of our levers, such as the women's program, we try to identify these issues early on so that we can figure out who in the government is best suited to apply the levers to it.

Page 6 deals with gender-based analysis. You might have heard about that in recent days. GBA, for those of you who may not be familiar with it, is a tool that looks at all the policies, programs, and legislation and makes evaluations of programs through a gender lens to see if it affects diverse groups of women and men disproportionately.

We also know it's not just about women and men, and that there are other intersecting factors underneath it, which is what we call GBA+, so we are looking at LGBTQ communities, looking at men, looking at age groups, looking at ethnicity, looking at education levels, and looking at income levels. We are looking at all those factors.

We have a really great course called GBA+ on our website. It's an online course that we are encouraging everyone to take. Everybody in our agency has to take that course, but other departments are increasingly starting to take that course at the working level. It takes about two hours. You can do it on your iPad. I've done it at home, sitting on my deck. It was great, and it really opens your eyes as to the questions to ask and how to think analytically about gender-based analysis.

• (1540)

The Auditor General came out last week and basically said that the government has not been doing a great job in terms of what it committed to do since the 1995 Beijing convention and since the last AG's report, which was in 2009. Basically, the AG said that we need to do a better job of identifying what the barriers are, why departments aren't doing a better job at applying this lens to their policies and programs, and whether among the central agencies we can look at better ways of monitoring and reporting on GBA, because we need to get better at it. We are working with PCO and with Treasury Board on a strategic plan for the next four years. We're hoping we can make progress on it.

With regard to providing advice, we have an intergovernmental table. There are provincial and territorial ministers. A lot of the provincial and territorial ministers responsible for the status of women are also responsible for other issues. For example, Premier Gallant in New Brunswick is also the minister for status of women. It used to be Premier McLeod in NWT who was the status of women minister.

That table has been meeting for 40 years. We meet annually and try to collaborate on ways to move forward. The agenda, for example, for the June meeting that's coming up in Edmonton will focus on violence against women and girls. Of course the inquiry on violence against indigenous women and girls and the gender wage gap are areas that will be included.

Turning to slide 8, you can see that we're also providing advice internationally, primarily through the UN. The UN Commission on the Status of Women is the main body that we liaise with. It's having its 60th meeting in March of this year. It's pretty exciting. We're hoping to see some of you at this committee meeting. It will be our Minister Hajdu's very first time. We're working on an exciting program in terms of meeting with colleagues bilaterally to work on the gender violence strategy, for example, or on other issues that are important to us.

Page 9 looks at the women's program, which is a grants and contribution program of about \$19 million. We basically fund groups such as not-for-profit organizations. We provide funding. It's not much; it's a maximum of \$500,000 per year for three years. Basically it's looking at barriers to equality.

As we say on page 10, we're trying to create systemic change. We don't just fund a conference here or a conference there. We're trying to work with partners within a particular community to make sure that the police are onside, or the education boards are onside, or the social service agencies are onside, and they're coming up with ways to look at some promising practices that might work, or tools for campus violence that might help. Basically we're trying to effect systemic change that's sustainable, so that when we pull out from our

funding after three years, the whole thing doesn't fall apart. Somebody else can take it and run with it. The three areas we target and work on are violence, economic security and prosperity, and leadership.

On page 11 we talk about raising awareness. A huge part of our job is to make sure that Canadians out there hear about all the various opportunities and challenges that women face in this country. It's about highlighting the positive. We know that role models and mentors are helpful. It's also about talking about the challenges that still remain and what can people do about them.

We have a lot of ministerial outreach to stakeholders, as you've seen from our minister, who's out there; she'll tell you more about it next week. We're also providing information to Canadians through social media. We have a website. We have a Twitter account. We have YouTube videos. Any which way we can, we're trying to get the message out. We have email blasts to schools. We create kits for teachers to use.

For example, you'll see on page 12 the various commemorative dates. The next one coming up is March 8, International Women's Day. The theme highlighted for that is "empowerment leads to equality". We've sent it out so that schools can prepare for it. They can have sessions and people can just talk it up, basically, all over the place.

We have a variety of these very set commemorative dates. They are internationally set. We gear up for them as communications opportunities. It would be great to have you as our champions for these events.

• (1545)

Turning to the current agency priorities, we're here to serve the Minister, and I'm sure you've seen her mandate letter.

These are the priorities from her mandate letter: the inquiry, which is continuing; the federal gender-based violence strategy, which we're working on; looking at appointments and at increasing women in leadership positions through a merit-based process, but still respecting gender parity; GBA, which I've talked about; and shelters and transition houses, which we know is a huge issue in terms of women fleeing domestic violence. They and their kids need somewhere to stay that is safe. In this case, for example, we'd be working with other ministers with the infrastructure funding. We're hoping that some of that will go toward shelters and transition houses.

Then there's working with ESDC, employment and skills development Canada, or whatever the new name is. I'm sorry; I haven't quite internalized the new names yet. We work with the labour program and Treasury Board Secretariat to look at workplaces and harassment policies, making sure that workplaces are free from harassment and sexual violence.

We're also working with the armed forces and the RCMP in terms of looking at their policies and how we can help them. We can't do those types of things for them, but we're a source of expertise. We can help them with data or advice on making presentations on how to incorporate culturally sensitive training in their policies.

Then of course, there's working with our other partners on, for example, the wage gap. We know that Ontario is going to be coming out any time now with their committee and their work on the wage gap. We'll be working with other provinces and territories to see how we can address issues related to the wage gap.

We'll turn to the last page. In terms of how big we are, in government circles we're called a micro-agency because we have 98, fewer than 100, people, and \$30 million. As I said earlier, we have about \$19 million in grants and contributions, and the rest is in salary and operating budget. We have three regional offices in Moncton, Montreal, and Edmonton. These are basically the various provinces and territories.

That's it. I'd be very pleased to answer any questions you might have.

• (1550)

The Chair: That is a wonderful overview, and I appreciate that.

We're going to be using the time allotment that we voted on at the last meeting, so for the first seven minutes it will be the Liberals who will ask questions. Your questions can be about specific programs they have, how you feel we should interact, or whatever else is on your mind.

Then, after seven minutes, we'll go to the next in the rotation, which is the Conservatives, and they'll get seven minutes, and so on and so forth.

We'll begin.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much for a wonderful presentation. There's fantastic work that your department is doing, and I hope our committee will be able to support it and take it into new directions that will enhance the material well-being of women and girls in Canada.

I was interested in some of the numbers you threw out. Of course, my particular area of interest is in democratic institutions and women in leadership. While I'm very familiar with the numbers when it comes to women in politics, you talked about women on private sector boards and you also talked about the GIC appointments. I think it was 34% for GIC appointments, but I missed the amount on private sector boards.

If there's anything that could be done to enhance those numbers, that would be of interest.

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: To clarify, on the private sector boards, it depends on whether you look at the FP500 or the TSX, which I think

is at around 17%, or if you look at other companies, where it's at almost 20%. It's around that mark. A few years ago, it was about 14%, so it's inching up by 2% at a time, very slowly.

What you can do about it is use the “comply or explain” model that the Ontario securities regulator put into place last year. It's coming up to about one year right now, and we know that certain sectors, such as the finance sector—banks, for example—are at 22% women, whereas mining is at around 7%.

There are varying numbers that we're getting. Now that we have this comply-or-explain model, publicly traded companies basically have to show how many women are on the board and how many women are senior executives. If they don't have 30%, they have to explain why. Is it because they couldn't get qualified women, which we know is not quite true?

We think that will be a change in the system, because we've never had that model before. About nine provinces and territories have adopted it. The others are yet to come, but this was the first year that they had to actually explain why. There's still data missing and still a lot more to be done, but now people have to explain. I think it's all about transparency, right? It's about asking the questions. Globally, too, everybody is asking that question: why don't you have more women on boards?

We see the system changing as well. There are now recruitment firms that, for a price, can give you a list of board-ready qualified women, so that there's not this thing about how women aren't ready or how they don't have any in the mining sector or whatever sector. They're saying that they can give you a list of them. There are recruitment firms that are going in that direction, so I think the system is starting to change to increase the number of women.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: You mentioned senior executive positions. Is that number higher than the number on boards, or is it roughly the same?

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: I'm not quite sure if it's higher or lower. I think it might be higher than it is for the women on boards.

One of the studies that just came out last week is a global study that said the impact on profitability—you've probably seen this—is not necessarily connected to having a woman CEO or having a board where women make up 30% of the membership. It really is correlated with the number of women senior executives on the board, because of the diversity of opinions in terms of carrying out their programs and policies. They found that those firms—and I think it was 91 companies—are much more profitable than the ones that had a lesser amount.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: That should provide incentives to companies.

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: Yes, exactly.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Where does Canada fit globally in this? I know that Norway, for instance, has actual legislation compelling companies to have parity.

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: Yes.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: I don't know about other countries. Where are we, roughly, in comparison internationally?

• (1555)

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: We're not doing very well. I'll go back to the figures. We rank 30th out of 145 countries on the World Economic Forum's 2015 global gender gap report. We are low there.

I know that countries are playing with legislation. You're right about Norway, and Germany just came out with legislation for women on boards. France has legislation. A lot of the Icelandic countries, which are very much higher than we are on the gender index, have legislation for these things.

It's something that can be explored, but right now in this country we're moving toward this comply-or-explain model versus the legislative mandatory kind of model.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: I saw in the notes that we've dropped 10 points. Is that right? We're 30th, but we used to be 20th. Is that correct?

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: Yes.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: What reasons would there be for that?

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: They're saying that it's because of the gender wage gap. We still have a gender wage gap.

There's also the democratic participation factor. Women's participation in the democratic life of Canada is much lower. I think it was countries like...

Correct me if I'm wrong, but Afghanistan was one of the countries —

A voice: Rwanda.

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: Yes, Rwanda is an example in terms of women in democratic institutions. There are variables that these indices look at, and they weigh them. Those were the two that were cited for our drop.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Would there be a link between that 73¢ on the dollar—the pay equity—and the number of women on corporate boards? Do you think there's a link in terms of women's economic participation in general?

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: We know that the women who are working—and we know there are more women than ever in the workforce—are going into the lower-paying jobs, and they're also at lower levels in an organization, so that contributes to the wage gap, which contributes to our lowered standing internationally as well. We have exact figures that I can send you.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: That would be great.

Thank you very much for sending us that. I think it will be very interesting. Thank you.

The Chair: Is there another question on your side, or will we switch over? You only have 20 seconds, so it has to be a quick one.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): No.

The Chair: All right. We'll go over to the Conservatives.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): I'm going to start with International Women's Day, which is coming up on March 8.

You talked about empowerment. What sort of strategies and tools are we using so that women—like ourselves, and Sean, of course...

What things are we doing so that we can use this tool to impact our youth and young women today?

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: That's a great question. Thank you.

What we've done, as I said earlier, is create a theme for this International Women's Day. We have material on our website that people can download. We've got a campaign on, basically, that is saying, "Tag a woman who empowers you."

If all of you were to do that and spread the message to all your contacts to basically get the word out, because we know that empowerment really does.... Having access to education and having access to jobs are all things you know very well will help. Coming from all of you as role models, it would be really powerful for us to have that message out there. Even having speeches or giving any kind of talks out there would be very powerful.

We have an MP kit that I'm being told about that you should have, so if you can just spread the word through your various networks, I think that's what it's all about. It's like getting the conversation going, getting a dialogue going among youth, as you said, because there are some people out there who are feeling it in spades in terms of how much more work there is to be done, and then there's another side that may not be as in tune with that idea, so it would be great to get the conversation going among youth to try to promote this international day of women.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I believe that empowering women is probably one of the biggest things that we can do, especially as members of Parliament, just by showing that we are here today, and this is what any girl can do.

What age group are you focusing on? I mean, I look at many families, and if the role of the mother is just to be the caregiver, we can see that there might be some idea that the caregiver role is what girls are supposed to do in the family. What sort of things are we focusing on so that they understand at a very early age that they're equal? What are we doing for that age group?

• (1600)

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: We don't target our programming to age groups. We basically target it generally.

I would invite my colleagues to speak.

We fund various projects that bring along women and girls. An example is our email blasts to schools and others. We work with high schools, but we don't go into elementary schools.

We fund projects. One example has to do with working women, but as a role model. It's this group called Women Building Futures in Edmonton. It is for women who want to work in the skilled trades. This not-for-profit organization basically goes out there and gets women and assesses them, because even if they want to be a crane operator, they might not be able to be a crane operator, so they do a very rigorous assessment. They bring the woman and her children in for six months' training, and in the basement they have the welders and the machine rooms to be able to do the training. The women and children are in condos, and they have schools nearby. The women are trained for six months. They have child care or schooling, and then they were guaranteed jobs waiting for them from some of the energy companies. These women went from working at McDonald's for \$20,000 to doing these jobs for maybe \$100,000. Mind you, this was a couple of years ago now, and the situation in Alberta is a little bit different now.

It's not targeting the children, but having the children looked after and seeing their moms as role models helps to advance that kind of thinking and prepare the next generation.

I invite my colleagues to add their comments.

Ms. Nanci-Jean Waugh (Director General, Communications and Public Affairs, Status of Women Canada): The tool kit that we provide to schools has ideas and suggestions for various activities that teachers can take on with their students in the schools. It could be elementary kids or it could be junior high or middle school, and then high school. They are also sent to community organizations so they can engage young people in those categories as well.

This year the most exciting part for us is that empowerment is going to be a full-year project for us and a full-year theme. As we move into Women's History Month as well as the International Day of the Girl, there will be more targeting on the theme.

Stay tuned over the next few days. You're going to be hearing a little more about empowerment and some of the projects that are possibilities.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: The empowerment that comes will go hand in hand with ending violence against women. I think that's true. That's why I'm wondering about what age group we start recognizing. I know there are 12-year-old girls who are being sexually assaulted today, and if they are empowered, is this going to help them? I think that's a really strong strategy that we should maybe focus on as well.

That's why there's the violence against women piece. When it comes to empowerment, I think it has to be not just about pay equity but also about the fact that they can stand their ground and they too can be grounded for their future. That's something that's very important to me.

On violence against women, what sorts of projects are we currently working on so that our young men and our young women recognize what is right and what is wrong?

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: I'll invite my colleague Linda to tell you about it.

Ms. Linda Savoie (Senior Director General, Women's Program and Regional Operations Directorate, Status of Women

Canada): Being the holder of the funds, I have a direct relationship with the projects.

As a strategy within the women's program, we have used a mix of targeted calls for proposals and open calls for proposals to fund a range of projects around the issue of violence among the other two pillars that are priorities for us. In terms of violence against women and girls, we've had some strategies that aim very directly at engaging men and boys in the reduction of violence against women and girls. We have some projects that are just ending now. We're looking forward to doing an analysis to figure out what the good strategies were and what worked well, and then sharing that knowledge.

Some projects were specifically focused on violence experienced by young women on campuses across the country. There was also a series of projects that ended in the last year. There's a lot of interest in our getting the knowledge out there. We're in the process of validating the lessons that we think have emerged with the groups that we've funded. We also have some projects under way right now that are looking very specifically at cyberviolence, in all its forms, as it is experienced by young women and girls.

We have these very targeted strategies. Having a cluster of projects that are examining the same issue across the country in various ways that are appropriate to their regional realities is a great source of knowledge for us.

Periodically we also have open calls, just to make sure we keep our ear to the ground. We had one last year where the groups were telling us about the concerns they had in terms of violence issues, for instance. There were some interesting things that were brought to our attention. Some were less discussed, such as the impact for women who are experiencing intimate partner violence and how that affects them in the workplace. It affects their performance. It affects their ability to be productive members of society in terms of their own finances. We've also had some issues brought to our attention around sexual reproduction coercion.

Those are interesting for us as red flags that we want to explore further. Those are the types of strategies and the types of investments we use.

• (1605)

The Chair: Excellent.

Your round is over, so we're on to Ms. Malcolmson. Don't worry. We have lots of time today. Everybody will get a chance to ask questions. I think it's good.

Go ahead, Sheila.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate the accessibility and the good work that you're doing.

You mentioned the mandate having not been changed, but I understood that equality had been removed from the Status of Women mandate in the previous government.

Could you speak to that?

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: Yes, it's something that we've tried to clarify, because since 1976 the mandate has been exactly what you've seen.

In our report on plans and priorities, which lays out the objectives, the word "equality" had been used, and it's still there because that's what we're doing all this for. It's to achieve or strengthen equality. It's still there, but for a time it was taken out of the report on plans and priorities as one of the objectives, and it was also taken out of the terms and conditions of the women's program.

It was never in the mandate. Technically, the mandate never had gender equality in it because it had been the mandate that was given to this agency through an order in council in 1976. Whenever the agency reported on what it was trying to do or what its strategic objectives were, we put into it that the objective of all the things we were doing was to achieve gender equality. It was taken out at the time.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Is it back in now?

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: Yes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Good. Thank you. That is good news.

I'm hoping you can speak a little more about the domestic violence strategy on gender-based violence. How close are we? I know there's been quite a lot of work done by NGOs. I think we're all anxious to see a strategy put in place, and I'm hoping that collectively we'll be able to build on the work that has been done.

How close are we to having a strategy in place that we can then work from?

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: We've been working on this since November, I guess, in terms of putting it together.

You're absolutely right, there are very many pieces in the federal government that are working on domestic violence or gender-based violence. We're working with our federal partners to have an assessment of what is out there in terms of legislation, strategy, framework, and funding programs. What's in the federal government? We've never really created a list to figure out what's going on in the federal government, so we're doing that.

We're looking at the provinces and territories and looking at their best practices. Examples are Ontario's new sexual violence campaign, called "It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment", and B.C.'s domestic violence-free strategy. We're looking at what the provinces are doing.

We're also going to be talking to some of our international stakeholders, such as Australia and New Zealand. We're going to be reaching out to stakeholders and experts in the coming months as soon as we get it framed together.

I'm sure this committee will be hearing from others on that, because it'll be an instrumental role in terms of how we craft this gender-based violence strategy. We know there's lots of advice out there in terms of a blueprint for what the strategy should look like, which we're also looking at.

• (1610)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: So the blueprint that was developed by national NGOs is something that is on your plate?

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: Absolutely, yes.

We're looking at that and we're working on a federal gender-based violence strategy. It's not necessarily a national strategy, because you don't want to duplicate what the provinces are doing. They're best placed to do what they're doing. They know their priorities. They know what works and what doesn't work in their province and they're proceeding at their own pace.

What we're trying to do in the federal government is to at least put it all together so that we can say this is what we have in the federal government in the family violence initiative that the Public Health Agency has or in some of the Criminal Code amendments that the Department of Justice has. We'll be putting together a lot of different pieces that are in the federal government and saying, "Okay, what does this look like, and how can we work together and build on what the provinces and territories are doing without duplicating what they're doing?"

It's going to be a different strategy from the Australian strategy, for example. It'll be a made-in-Canada strategy.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: You're working toward restoration of shelter funding for domestic violence victims. Can you give us any kind of a teaser about some of the discussions that are under way or how you see a revitalization of that commitment unfolding?

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: I'm sorry, I can't tell you about the discussions under way, but we're hopeful you'll find out soon.

There is definitely a recognition. You'll hear our minister speak very eloquently, from her experience on the front lines running a shelter, about there being no question that there is a need for shelters and services when we have about 500 women and their children being turned away from a shelter every day. There is a need out there.

Again, we have some federal levers and we have to work with the provinces and territories to ensure that we're all providing what women need at this time. It's definitely on our agenda. We are having lots of discussions and trying to push to ensure that we're going in that direction.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Regarding vulnerability to violence in the first place, can you tell us a bit about what you're working on with regard to the income inequality front, the poverty element that makes women and children vulnerable to violence in the first place?

Ms. Justine Akman (Director General, Policy and External Relations, Status of Women Canada): Chair, if I could jump in, this is one of the situations in which Status of Women is an enabler, an organization that works with other federal organizations to ensure there's a gender lens in the programs and policies that are being developed. It's related to the wage gap strategy and doing something to focus on women who are in poverty to ensure they can have the tools and resources to get out of poverty.

One of the main initiatives under this government will be a national child care strategy, so we'll be working with the department. These aren't programs and policies that Status of Women itself is leading, but child care is going to be one of the critical programs.

Then a number of other initiatives will be undertaken under this government that we will be working on with our federal colleagues. Status of Women itself does have some women's programs, but women and poverty is generally our focus from the policy side. We're working with our federal colleagues on specific initiatives to address the issue.

The Chair: All right. I'm going to go back to the Liberals, but I'm going to add a minute and a half to you guys because we ran over a little on some of the questions.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Sure. What's the total time? I might want to split that.

The Chair: We've got a full hour of discussion, and we started at about 25 to, so it will be another 20 to 25 minutes of discussion.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Okay.

Thanks very much for coming in. I really appreciate it. I think this is a fantastic way to kick off the real work. I understand that one of the things at the table is not like the others—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Sean Fraser: —but I promise I will do my best to become educated in advance of these sessions so I can be a meaningful contributor to the discussion.

One of the things I'd like to talk about is the stigma around gender-based violence, particularly intimate partner violence. I come from a very small community, and people don't talk. I think a healthy way to kick-start a discussion so that we can become advocates is to get information.

You touched on the economic costs of gender-based violence. Is there a way we can find objective information that could be a conversation starter in communities like mine?

●(1615)

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: Yes, absolutely, and I think we have some really good projects in what constitutes healthy relationships, for example. Just having those kinds of conversations is useful, so that at a young age both girls and boys are able to say that it's not acceptable for him to treat me like this or for him to share my pictures on his cellphone without my consent. There are all those kinds of issues. We're trying to fund projects, and then they can provide some more information.

There can be discussions. For example, there are the white ribbon campaigns with Todd Minerson, who is doing some amazing work on the new masculinity and what it means to be a man and what defines masculinity. He's having a conference in Toronto this weekend. Those kinds of conversations in which men are talking about it and are able to talk about these things in an open way is huge. Men are part of the solution.

I'll let Linda respond too.

Ms. Linda Savoie: Thanks.

You raised some very interesting points, because a few years ago we were looking at some statistics on the rates of intimate partner violence across the country, and an overwhelming majority of the locations were in rural or remote areas, not the larger urban centres or even medium urban centres that we would have anticipated as a result of the volume of people. As a result, we funded a number of projects that were specifically looking at violence in rural communities to see some of the emerging issues, some of the very peculiar challenges.

There were things we anticipated, such as issues around transportation and infrastructure and supports that were lacking, but one thing that was also a big factor was the lack of confidentiality raised by many women in not having that safety net of being able to discuss things with someone who was not their neighbour or who didn't know their entire family history. There were some interesting findings there.

I can't say that we have the solutions yet, but we are working with groups and looking at further exploring those issues through funding further projects.

That's an example of the type of work we're doing.

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: Can I have a moment to add something that pertains to some of the other questions too?

We're trying to empower women and girls to speak up and also to engage men and boys to say, "Don't be a bystander. Don't let somebody get away with this kind of behaviour." The purpose of all these projects, whether it's in rural communities or projects with men and boys, is really to get a dialogue going about that issue and get some tools that will help people in their communities or in their interactions with each other in schools and their peer groups to be able to talk about these things.

There's an Ontario campaign called It's Never Okay. I don't know if you've seen the commercials, but they're really fantastic in speaking up and saying "It's not okay, it's never okay", and just having those conversations.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I don't want to cut in on the ability of somebody else to ask a question, but would it be possible for me to get information that I can pass on to women's organizations at home that could potentially take part in the kind of work you're doing in small towns and rural communities?

Ms. Linda Savoie: Yes. If there's a particular area of focus, we can certainly connect them to other groups in a similar environment and that have learned lessons through our funding projects. Whatever aspect is of interest to you—if it's violence in a rural environment, for instance—at this point we can look at our expert groups.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Should we just go through you guys for now?

Ms. Linda Savoie: Sure.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Perfect. Thank you very much.

Ms. Linda Savoie: It's our pleasure.

Ms. Pam Damoff: One thing you talked about is getting women into non-traditional jobs. Skilled trades was one area. Have you looked at barriers to explain why they aren't getting into some of those jobs?

For example, if you want to go into policing or many of the non-traditional jobs, you have to be prepared to do shift work, and you can't get child care for that. Have you looked at some of the barriers to getting women into non-traditional jobs and at how we address those barriers? If we remove them, then we make it possible for women to get into these well-paying non-traditional jobs.

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: Absolutely we've been looking at that. In fact, on our website we've created a business case to show the economic benefit of having women in some of these non-traditional jobs in the skilled trades and how companies and employers can remove or address the barriers when they're hiring women.

Basically, even recruitment strategies that they have for women can change, in terms of what attracts women. Instead of having an interview at 3:30 in the afternoon, when women have to go to pick up their children, for example, the time of the interview could be changed. Small things can go a huge way in recruiting more women to these jobs.

Workplace culture is another aspect. Many women who go into these various non-traditional fields find that they're the one of whatever—the first helicopter technician, or engineer, or whatever—and the workplace culture is just not conducive to their staying in those jobs. Even though they trained for them and made it into that workplace, they're leaving, for whatever reason. Perhaps it's because the workplace isn't conducive to child care or elder care, or perhaps it's because of workplace habits, in terms of the teams and the kind of language that's used out there.

One thing we've tried to do is create a business case so that there can be consensus around the country whereby people can say, yes, this is why we need more women on boards. A few years ago Status of Women worked with the Conference Board of Canada, and we came up with a business case—and now it's out there—that people are talking about. Now it's becoming much more common to talk about the business case for women on boards, about why more is better and is profitable and all that.

Concerning women in skilled trades, we still have a way to go, because, as I said, 95% of the people in skilled trades are still men. What can we do? We also did a business case on women in skilled trades, which employers can use, to provide some strategies they can employ to attract more women into these fields. That's on our website, and we have the provincial and territorial governments working with us, so they're promoting it to all the employers out there.

We're finding out from some folks that women in some of these cases are actually better for the bottom line because, for example, they take better care of the big trucks they're driving because they actually read the manual. This is what the Canadian Truckers Association, for example, told us.

Another example is the mill workers in the forestry and the paper products industry. They're saying that they're much more organized,

they clean up after themselves, they delegate well, they're better team players.

That's not to say that women are better than men. It's not going down that road. It's just basically saying not to discount women because they have child care responsibilities or because they can't come to the interview or because they have to do things a little differently in the workplace. We're trying to promote that, absolutely.

The business case is on our website, but if you'd like, we can send it to you as well.

• (1620)

The Chair: All right. Around we go.

Go ahead, Ms. Wagantall.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Thank you so much for presenting today. I appreciate the very important work that you do. Within the House of Commons, I'm new at this. Hopefully my questions will make sense.

You talked a lot about wage parity and the gap there. It's something that we really do have to improve. It is foundational in so many ways. In the House, the minister has talked about the dynamics of a number of programs that have been in place, and you guys have all the experience here. She mentioned that we're not going to reinvent the wheel when something is working really well.

With the various roles that you play, is there a nugget or two that has been extremely effective in what you've done? If you could share it with us, that would be great.

Ms. Justine Akman: I believe this committee has studied best practices to address violence against women fairly recently, so that would be something of interest to take a look at.

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: We are always trying to look at best practices and trying to make sure that people across the country know about them so that they're not reinventing the wheel.

For example, we put success stories on our website. We've taken projects, asked why they succeeded and what they did differently, and put them up on our website so that, hopefully, somebody in Newfoundland sees what somebody in B.C. is doing and can employ the same programs.

We've also taken a list of all these projects that engage men and boys in different ways. There's the Don't be a Bystander campaign. There's the Moose Hide campaign, and there are various other programs that have been done across the country. We're trying to say that if you want to engage men and boys, go and talk to these people, wherever they are, and get lessons learned. We're trying to connect them.

As Linda was saying, for example, even in something like campus violence, where we funded these projects, we have some great data coming out. Not everybody was involved in them, so we're trying to figure out creative ways of getting people involved—not just the ones who worked on the projects, but others—so they can take some of these best practices and say that they need a simple guidance document, or this or that kind of a tool.

We're trying to do that as much as possible everywhere we can.

•(1625)

Ms. Linda Savoie: We have some pretty spectacular projects under way. We have a series of projects taking place in the digital economy. They're trying to ensure that women are attracted to the tech world and the information technologies, and once they're in, they're retained and advanced. Through working with some associations that are well connected with large players and large corporations, like IBM, they review human resources and hiring practices. Maybe those corporations are not asking the right questions or shopping in the right places. Maybe the women they're marketing their jobs to are still thinking of technologists as nerds in their basement, or something like *The IT Crowd*, if you've watched that show. They're trying to destigmatize the picture of what a woman in technology looks like and make sure that the practices around hiring, retention, and the culture in the workplace are adapted accordingly.

Those are the types of interventions that we like to support. They transform the environment. Rather than tossing more women into a bad environment, they transform the environment with the help of the people who are part of those environments and have the expertise. They know their environments and they can be the change agents.

Some very interesting projects are under way. There are strategies that are not just employed by Status of Women. We have some colleagues in other departments who are putting a very strong gender lens to their programs. It's quite encouraging for us to watch them do that and be very thorough, making sure that the programs they're putting in place, such as for new immigrants, are well adapted to both men and women. There are lots of good practices out there.

The Chair: Thank you. That's excellent.

We're at the end of the time that we had indicated we would have you here. The good news for everybody is that Meena is not going

off the planet. We can have her back as many times as we want and as often as we want.

I appreciate your coming and I appreciate the questions. I'm looking for some input from the team as to whether we should put you on the agenda to have you back again. Maybe it could be Thursday. My people will work with your people.

Thank you.

Ms. Meena Ballantyne: We are back next week with Minister Hajdu, as well, on Tuesday.

It's up to you. We really look forward to working with this committee, so thank you so much for your time.

The Chair: Very good.

I believe that the parliamentary secretary is here. They asked me about you the other day, and I wasn't sure if I had introduced myself.

I need a motion for you to be able to remain for the rest of the meeting, so could I have a motion from someone?

Mr. Sean Fraser: I so move.

The Chair: They've explained to me that I don't need a seconder in this parliamentary world, so you're it. You just made a decision, and you're on the record.

Welcome. You're welcome to stay.

We're going to suspend for the in camera part of this meeting. The fun part for the newbies is that when they say "in camera", what they really mean is "off camera". We're going to go off the radar here, so we can all feel free to have a more congenial discussion about what the committee's going to do.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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