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Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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• (1540)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order. It being 3:38, I hope we can make up those eight minutes and end at 5:38 instead, guys, because we have a lot of work to do.

Before I let Candice speak, I want to welcome Minister Guergis, Ms. Paquette, and Ms. Waugh from the agency of Status of Women Canada, who are here to speak to the performance report.

Yes, Candice.

Ms. Candice Hooppner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I want to raise a point of order. I realize we have a lot of work to do, but I feel it's very important, and I would like to raise this point of order.

First of all, and most importantly, based on what's happened this past week with the politicization of remembrances in Montreal—

The Chair: I don't think this is appropriate right now.

Ms. Candice Hooppner: It absolutely is. It's privy to our doing our work.

The Chair: No, we are not discussing business—

Ms. Candice Hooppner: But we can't do our work. We can't do our work.

The Chair: The minister is here, Ms. Hooppner. I will rule you out of order—

Ms. Candice Hooppner: I would like to continue with my point of order, Madam Chair—

The Chair: Will you listen to the minister? When we discuss committee business, you may bring that up—

Ms. Candice Hooppner: We can't even carry on. We cannot carry on with what has gone on this week.

If people disagree with the long gun registry, they have every right to disagree with it, but to politicize this remembrance is wrong. To demonize me and to say that I don't care about women and that somehow I don't have the right to be at that event—and I was told that by every party, everybody that's at this table—

The Chair: Ms. Hooppner, this is not a point of order.

Ms. Candice Hooppner: It is absolutely a point of order.

The Chair: Minister, will you please begin your presentation?

Ms. Candice Hooppner: We cannot do our work. How can we continue with our work? We cannot continue with our work. You're basically saying—

The Chair: Ms. Hooppner, I have ruled you out of order.

Ms. Candice Hooppner: This pertains to business.

The Chair: No. You cannot challenge the chair. You are out of order.

The minister is here. She's here to present on a particular thing. We can discuss this when the minister has left.

Minister Guergis.

Ms. Candice Hooppner: We cannot do our work—

The Chair: Minister Guergis, please.

Ms. Hooppner, please restrain yourself.

Hon. Helena Guergis (Minister of State (Status of Women)): Madam Chair, if I could highlight, I know many times I've been around this table, and without sounding perhaps petty...my name is pronounced "George-iss". I know that often lots of opposition members mispronounce my name. I'm not sure if it's because they don't know how to say my name or if it's on purpose, but I would really appreciate it if we could pronounce it as "George-iss" because it is "George-iss".

The Chair: I am sorry, Minister Guergis.

Begin, please.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Thank you very much.

Madam Chair and committee members,

[Translation]

It's a pleasure to have you with us today.

[English]

Since November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and with December 6 just a few days away, I am pleased to be here this afternoon to share with you the concrete actions that our government is taking to increase women's full participation in Canadian Life.

I would like to begin by offering my thanks and appreciation for the extensive work that has been carried out by this committee in a variety of areas that touch the lives of women and girls in this country and in other parts of the world. I believe we are united in our goal to build a Canada in which women and girls are safe, engage in the democratic process, and enjoy prosperity and financial security as full participants in our economy. Perhaps at times we differ on the methods we need to take in order to reach this goal, but ultimately we want the same things, and as women around this table so often, we should be working towards that goal together.

We believe that addressing these challenges requires a multi-layered, multidisciplinary, and multi-faceted approach that includes, in addition to a commitment to end violence against women, that we support women's full involvement in our economy and in the political leadership of our nation. We know that an individual woman or girl who has access to education, to employment opportunities, to mentors and to other important economic and social assets is less likely to find herself dependent upon others, or vulnerable to poverty, violence, and discrimination.

This committee has done some very important work on issues such as gender-based analysis, pay equity, pensions, the extension of EI benefits to self-employed women, and many others. I congratulate all of you for these important contributions to the ongoing search for the best and most effective ways to advance equality for women and their full participation in the economic, social, and democratic life of our country.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss how the priorities and activities of the Government of Canada are moving us closer to these goals. For example, I am sure you are aware of the many OECD reports that note that the surest way for a nation to advance economically and socially is to empower women. I'd like to highlight that on October 28 the World Economic Forum released its Global Gender Gap Index report. Canada moved ahead of the United States in the annual global survey. This survey assessed the participation of women in the economic and democratic life of 134 countries. In fact, we did rise six spots to 25th.

We are a leader in three of the four categories: economic participation, educational attainment, and health. The fourth category was political empowerment, and every one of us around this table knows that we have a lot of work to do. Canada was in fact first in literacy rates and in economic participation, and we continue as a government to work to close the gender gap. Canada's standing gained ground as a result of improvements in the economic performance of women. That is real progress for women and real progress for Canada.

I'd like to talk about the role of Status of Women Canada and some of our key activities. In Canada, women and men are equal under the law. Status of Women Canada collaborates with a number of partners such as other federal departments and agencies, provincial and territorial governments, the private and voluntary sectors, and international organizations on an ongoing basis. Our efforts are directed toward an overall outcome to strengthen the full participation of women in the economic, social, and democratic life of Canada. But to achieve this outcome, we have two program activities, the provision of strategic policy advice and financial assistance for projects through the Women's Community Fund and

the Women's Partnership Fund, which I will speak about a little bit later.

The first is the provision of strategic policy advice and analysis, training and tools, as well as the development of partnerships to support federal departments and central agencies in integrating gender-based analysis in their policies, programs, and their services. As committee members will know, the Government of Canada has agreed with the recommendations of the Auditor General that the Treasury Board Secretariat and the Privy Council Office provide support to Status of Women Canada to help the government meet its commitments to gender-based analysis. This includes assessments of the differential impacts on women and men in policy and program development, taking intersectionality into account as well as the collection and monitoring of data. I'm very pleased that we're seeing a great deal of progress on this front.

● (1545)

The second program activity is the provision of funding and professional assistance for local, regional, and national projects that further the cause of women's equality through the Women's Community Fund and the Women's Partnership Fund. These activities are structured around the three pillars, which I announced earlier this year, of promoting economic security for women, promoting the ending of violence against women, and promoting leadership for women in key decision-making bodies.

These investments in grants and contributions are helping women across the country. Since 2007, Status of Women Canada has funded projects that have had a direct impact on more than 140,000 girls and women and an indirect impact on over 1.6 million girls and women.

Innovations at Status of Women Canada have allowed us to fund 69% more initiatives than in previous years, assisting hundreds of thousands more women. These projects are empowering more and more women with information, knowledge, skills, and support networks, and women are using these tools for success to identify and overcome barriers that impede their full participation in society.

A sampling of some of these successful projects during 2008-09 indicates that 50% of them were directed at issues related to women's economic security and prosperity, 42% addressed violence against women issues, and 8% focused on women's leadership and their decision-making roles. In March of this year I announced a partnership with WEConnect Canada, an organization that delivers the leading international certification standard for women-owned businesses.

We provided funding for a project called Opening Doors to Corporate Markets, which is an education, training, coaching, and mentoring program. This program seeks to increase economic opportunities for women-owned businesses by increasing market access in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries such as China and India. I first learned of this program in my former role as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and International Trade. I continue to support this program because I believe in the importance of market access.

Through the new Partnership Fund of Status of Women Canada, our government is supporting women in non-traditional trades. We are working with the Canadian Advanced Technology Alliance, CATA WIT, to support women in leadership in advanced technology sectors. We are providing knowledge transfer through our support to the well-known Women Building Futures initiative, which focuses on non-traditional fields such as the trades and construction and heavy equipment operations, supporting women who are coming from very difficult situations into this program. Let me tell you that the men I have been speaking with in the construction industry are telling me they prefer women in these roles: we're not breaking the equipment.

The Chair: Minister, excuse me, I don't mean to interrupt you, but witnesses have 10 minutes and you only have one and a half minutes left, so perhaps you can find a way to fast-forward your—

Hon. Helena Guergis: I'll do the best I can, Madam Chair. I have probably a lot more than a minute here, so I'll do the best I can.

The Chair: Yes, then you should try to finish it in 10 minutes.

Hon. Helena Guergis: The men in the construction industry, as I said, are saying that they prefer women because we are not breaking the equipment. Placement rates for the graduates in this program are over 90%, and we are now funding a project to transfer that knowledge to other organizations in all provinces. These are well-paying jobs. They're jobs that women deserve to have an opportunity in and to prosper in.

Partnerships have been created with Equal Voice, which everyone is aware of. It's a multi-partisan organization and represents another opportunity not to be overly partisan. We should be supporting each other, encouraging more mentors, and encouraging young women to get involved in politics and to stay involved.

I've also met with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and I'm supporting some of the work they want to do, particularly for women in rural Canada. These initiatives, as you know, are very key, because increasing the political literacy skills of women will result in more women being elected and more women around these tables.

I'll close with a few comments on aboriginal women.

We have put a very special emphasis on the unique challenges of women who face multiple barriers, and that would be our aboriginal women. The violence against aboriginal women is a major concern for this government. Aboriginal women, as we know, are three times more likely to experience this violence and five times more likely to die as a result of it.

The Sisters in Spirit initiative is designed to increase public awareness. I think everyone around this table would agree that they have done an excellent job in raising public awareness of murdered

and missing aboriginal women. They are also doing a multi-research program on getting a better understanding as to the root causes of the racialized and sexualized violence that our aboriginal women are experiencing.

We are working on the next steps and exploring the next options. I am working closely with the Native Women's Association. I appreciate the incredible work they have done. I also appreciate the work that the families have done. It takes a great deal of courage to tell the stories of their lost loved ones, of the lost spirits, in order to help us to make change for the future. I know we will all appreciate their contribution.

Thanks to this initiative, we have seen an increase in public engagement, and that includes questions being raised in the House of Commons. We intend to continue to work with our federal, provincial, and territorial partners to build on the results and to find some good programs that will help to end this violence.

Madam Chair, I do have some more comments, but as you have indicated, there's no time for me to continue to give the members around this table a report on some of the other great things we're doing.

● (1550)

The Chair: I just gave you an indication that we had reached 10 minutes. If this committee feels they would like to give you the extra time to finish your report, of course I will move according to the committee's decision.

Would the committee like to give the minister a few more minutes?

Okay, that's fine; you can finish.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Thank you.

While our government has made progress in enhancing women's participation on a wide range of issues by developing supportive policies and measures to address critical challenges and by providing the resources to help deal with them, we know that there is much more work to be done.

I have been meeting with Canadians from coast to coast to coast to engage women in particular on how best to promote economic security and prosperity for women, on what they think is the best way to approach ending violence against women, and how they think we can encourage more women to be involved in the democratic process and in key leadership roles.

Our government is working to deliver real results to Canadians by advancing women's full participation. We are acting to advance the goal of empowering women across Canada, as strong women make a strong Canada.

In these times of economic uncertainty, the Government of Canada continues to work to advance equality for women in all aspects of Canadian life. We recognize that women's skill sets, their leadership, and their expertise must be fully utilized if Canada is to maintain its high standard of living and to compete successfully on the global stage.

Our government responded to the economic downturn by introducing our economic action plan, a plan to stimulate the economy, maintain and create jobs for Canadian women and men, and protect those hardest hit by the recession.

The *Fourth Report to Canadians* presented by our Finance Minister yesterday has shown that 97% of the stimulus funding in Canada's plan has been committed to more than 12,000 infrastructure and housing projects. About 8,000 or 66% of these projects have already begun in the 10 months since the two-year plan was launched.

Some of the progress made in implementing the economic action plan includes reducing the tax burden for Canadian families and businesses by more than \$20 billion over 2008-09 and the following five fiscal years; supporting those Canadian workers who have lost their jobs or may face layoffs through additional employment insurance benefits and training opportunities; and creating and preserving jobs through investment in modern infrastructure and affordable housing; supporting research and advanced education by funding much-needed maintenance, repair, and construction projects at colleges and universities across Canada; protecting jobs and industries in communities hit hardest by the recession; and taking unprecedented action to improve the availability of finance for households and businesses in Canada.

Our efforts are having a positive effect. The IMF expects Canada's recovery to be the strongest in the G-7, laying the foundations for the future prosperity of women and men in Canadian society.

I want to assure you that our government will continue to invest in projects that touch women directly and impact their lives in key areas.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

I will begin with the question round. The first round is seven minutes. That includes questions and answers.

We begin with Ms. Neville.

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

Thank you very much, Minister, for being here today.

I have a lot of questions and I know our time is limited, so I hope we can be economical with the answers, for lack of a better word.

We went through the performance report, Madam Chair, and it says that in 2008-09 Status of Women Canada sought to achieve a strategic outcome. After glancing through the 2009 public accounts, we note in volume two that it appears there was some lapsed funding—and the funding is cited on page 526—in our contributions

for women's programs. The total funds available were \$6,600,000 and the total used was approximately \$3,474,000. What happened to the additional \$3.1 million? Has it been carried over? Will it be distributed elsewhere?

Mrs. Cindy Paquette (Director, Corporate Services Directorate, Status of Women Canada): Do you want me to answer that one first?

Hon. Anita Neville: Please.

Mrs. Cindy Paquette: There was a lapse of \$3.6 million in the public accounts, but \$2.4 million of that was carried forward to this fiscal year. We have multi-year projects and we wanted to put the money in the years where we thought it would be used.

Hon. Anita Neville: That's fine, thank you.

Minister, we've gone through the employee public service report, which I'm sure you're familiar with, and it gives us some concern. I cite page 24 of the report. It's a lengthy report. When you go through all of the questions, the office of the coordinator of the status of women frequently is below the numbers for the Public Service of Canada for satisfaction, and frequently below the small organizations. But I particularly want to cite the question answered: "I feel that the quality of my work suffers because of... lack of stability in my department." Certainly, your office does not come out very well. It's well below the other small organizations.

Can you comment on that?

Hon. Helena Guergis: I'll have Nanci-Jean respond to that one.

Ms. Nanci-Jean Waugh (Director General, Communications and Strategic Planning Directorate, Status of Women Canada): Over the course of the last period of time, we've had a number of changes take place at Status of Women Canada. We have had new terms and conditions for the program. We have had a number of new initiatives that have been started. So we have been in a period of change and transition, which I believe is quite natural for some difficulties.

As a result of the employees survey, one of the activities we had undertaken was a wellness initiative, to work with the staff more, to be able to look at the root causes of some of the concerns and problems that we had. We've moving forward with that wellness initiative.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

Undoubtedly you've gone through the whole performance review. In most categories the Status of Women organization is substantially below either the public service average or the small offices and organizations.

Can you tell me, is there a new coordinator appointed? Is there now some stability in the department? Everything we are hearing, everything we are seeing, the reports—they all indicate a significant lack of stability in the office. Given that it's not a large office, what's happening there?

• (1600)

Hon. Helena Guergis: I can advise you that we do have a new coordinator. I think she will be starting December 14. She is here today, and her name is Suzanne Clément.

Hon. Anita Neville: Congratulations.

Hon. Helena Guergis: She's an outstanding woman, and I think her expertise and what she brings to the table and the knowledge that she already has on the files will be very helpful as we go forward.

Let me also say that the officials we have—those I've come to know since I became the minister—think we've had a really good working relationship. We've worked very hard together. We're small but we're mighty. Let me say that they have accomplished a great deal, and they should be exceptionally proud of the work they produce. Honestly, looking at the size of our agency and comparing it to other agencies that have far more officials, we're right at the same level of production as they are. So I have to give them a round of applause for the incredible work they're doing.

Hon. Anita Neville: I recognize that they work hard, but I also recognize after going through this report that there are some serious issues in the office. I'm pleased to hear that you're addressing them, because the work is important.

You talk frequently about aboriginal women. I appreciate that, and you know my concerns in that area. You mentioned some of the contributions you made last year, including the repeal of section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act and advancing legislation on matrimonial real property. Can you give us some details on what contributions you gave to the following pieces of legislation and what actions your government is prepared to take with matrimonial real property legislation? Undoubtedly you know that NWAC, the AFN Women's Council, and several other high-profile women are very concerned about the legislation. I'm wondering whether in your activities you have read the report of the rapporteur Mr. Prentice appointed, Wendy Grant-John, who made some very deliberate and pointed recommendations on that piece of legislation.

Hon. Helena Guergis: I'm not the lead on that file, as you're more than well aware—it's Minister Strahl—but I can tell you that we will continue to work with all the aboriginal organizations, including the women, to ensure they are alongside as we go through this process to ensure that they have the same matrimonial property rights as all Canadians enjoy.

I can assure you that at the cabinet table I do engage in these conversations, but I know that you know that those cabinet conversations are confidential.

Hon. Anita Neville: Do I have any time?

The Chair: No, that's it, Ms. Neville.

Go ahead, Monsieur Desnoyers.

[Translation]

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

Welcome, Madam Minister.

We have heard about and are hearing about possible budget cuts. That worries me a lot when it's about the status of women. Could there be cuts like that in this budget? As you stated, there is still a great deal to be done. I think a lot of money is needed. Ms. Neville was talking aboriginal persons and all the projects and programs which you mentioned and which have been put forward. That is my first question.

[English]

Hon. Helena Guergis: The answer is no.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: It's no.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Right now, our government proudly boasts that the funding for Status of Women Canada is at its highest level in Canada's history. I have already commented on the increases in the number of projects in grassroots organizations that are now supported. It's a 69% increase, but 42% of that is for the first time, which is significant. On the violence pillar alone, about 117 projects at \$23 million are going on right now.

So no, we don't anticipate. We put the funds there for a good reason. We just had a call for proposal, and I'm looking forward to making some significant announcements in the very near future on the projects that we'll be funding going forward.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: You say you spend more on advocacy for women's rights than on basic research and all aspects of lobbying for women's rights. When we see what there is currently, it seems there is not a lot. I would like to hear a bit of what you have to say on that subject.

• (1605)

[English]

Hon. Helena Guergis: I'm not sure if you're familiar with any of my background, but I did seven and a half years in rape crisis training and crisis intervention. The statistics on violence against women right now are actually the same, so I was shocked when I came into this position to notice that, to have it highlighted for me that things hadn't changed.

Obviously, when a new government comes in, they do things differently, and we made some significant changes at Status of Women. We made a decision that we would be supporting the grassroots organizations and that we would be looking to those organizations that are considered experts not only on the ground and on the front line, but in their individual communities, so there are now hundreds of projects going on at the grassroots level in all communities across the country. They are helping women in line with the three pillars that I spoke of earlier and that I announced.

I think it's really important to recognize that these grassroots organizations know what the individual communities need. I'd also like to highlight for you that I am the first minister appointed to be solely dedicated to the Status of Women, and that is, in my mind, a strong advocacy position.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: You talked about your three pillars: prosperity, violence and democracy.

As far as prosperity is concerned, you must know that we are in the midst of a major economic crisis. At present, women are the ones suffering the most from this crisis. Many have had to leave good jobs because they were at the bottom of the seniority list in many places. We look at companies like Nortel, which have shut down and where hundreds, if not thousands, of women worked. I could give you a whole list.

You seem very positive when you talk about prosperity for women, but in the field, we realize that there is not really prosperity for women. Irrespective of what you have been able to accomplish in the short time I have been on this committee, I have not had the feeling that women have played a much bigger role in Canada and in Quebec, because of the current economic crisis. There are currently no new jobs. We cannot hide from that fact. There is a financial bubble and a financial recovery. Before women once again take their place in our society, they will suffer a great deal, they will still be poorer.

There is regular discussion these days about pensions for women, among whom impoverishment is even greater. Women will reach retirement age with very, very little. Immigrant women are totally forgotten; they are at the lowest levels of our society and are extremely poor. We get no sense that there is a significant push to change that. There is definitely an economic crisis, and that has to be taken into account. I would like to hear a bit of what you have to say on that subject.

When you talk about prosperity, you seem to be saying that there is a great deal of momentum on this front, whereas we don't feel that on a day-to-day basis in our society.

[English]

Hon. Helena Guergis: Yes. Thank you.

The Chair: You have one and a half minutes, Mr. Desnoyers.

Hon. Helena Guergis: To address your last point, I highlighted for you the gender gap report. It's actually the World Economic Forum gender gap report, which highlighted Canada in women's economic participation, in which we saw significant changes in Canada. So it doesn't have to be me that you believe. I'm happy to provide you with a copy of that report.

Of course, our country and our government is focused on the economic crisis—that's been our number one priority since we became the government—and working to implement the economic action plan. We are focused on all Canadians, and of course women are a part of that. They are more than 53% of the population now, so they do benefit from that significantly.

On pension income-splitting, you talked about senior women. The pension income-splitting that our government introduced was well received.

On immigrant women, you're quite right, they do face significant barriers. They face a lot of barriers.

Since we're still in the 16 Days of Activism to End Violence against Women, I think it's a good opportunity for me to highlight for members around the table that today I made an announcement alongside all the provinces and territories, the provincial representatives for the shelter networks in each of the provinces, and including aboriginal representation. We announced a new partnership today to ensure that they will have a national voice. They're forming a national group, and I'm going to be funding a project that's going to allow them to train each other and share best practices, with a strong focus on immigrant women.

●(1610)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: I just have one little question.

[English]

Hon. Helena Guergis: For immigrant women in different part of the countries, sometimes it can be cultural issues that they're dealing with. Others are looking for the best practices that are carried on and whether they can learn from that.

So that was a significant announcement today. It's the first time it has ever happened, where we've been able to bring all of these people together and come out with such a significant partnership. I'm sure that regardless of partisan stripe here, you'll applaud that.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Desnoyers. You have gone over time.

Ms. Hoepfner.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

I want to change direction a little bit with you. You spoke a little bit about encouraging women to get involved in politics, in the political process. I know that we have taken some great strides and made investments in Equal Voice and providing leadership so that we can mentor young women and get them involved.

I'm wondering if you can comment on the importance of allowing women with a diverse view on a variety of issues to be able to speak. I'm going to give you an example. There are hundreds of thousands of rural women, farming women, aboriginal women, women in the military, women across this country who, for example, believe the long gun registry needs to end. They have been told this week to sit down, be quiet, and don't dare attend an event, don't dare attend a memorial, because we disagree with your view. I'm wondering how you see that as productive and if you see that as helping women get involved.

I'm going to say this. I think women need to know that this can be a battlefield, and you need to be able to defend what you believe in. To be told to sit down and be quiet, time after time after time... Can you comment on what message that sends to young women, to older women, to Canadian women?

Thank you.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Candice, I actually agree with everything you've just said. I don't think that's going to surprise anybody.

Every time I have an opportunity to meet with women across the country, I raise this issue. I talk about the partisan nature of this House and how difficult it is right now, still, for women, for the things we want to accomplish. If we could just lay down our partisan swords and work together, think about how much farther we could be. Unfortunately, there are some of us around the table who are not interested in doing that.

I can recall, when in opposition, when we sat around this table of the status of women committee, that we did not behave that way, that we did not carry on in that manner because we knew it was inappropriate. We were there not just for ourselves or for our own political stripe, but for all women. I believe we have a responsibility to do that.

I thank you for highlighting that.

The reason I support Equal Voice is that they're doing an exceptional job of leaving that at the door. It's about teaching women and showing them how they can get themselves elected, free from the policy discussion. I think that's key. We don't need any special treatment as women. Just show us how, and we soar. That's why I support Equal Voice.

I thank you very much for highlighting that.

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: I know we're talking about issues pertaining to women that women are speaking about, but what I'm thinking as well is that there are a lot of women who want to bring up issues besides motherhood and apple pie. They want to bring up issues that are not traditional women's issues. How do we say, hey, you might have disagreement on that policy...? I think it's fair game to disagree with policy, but how do we still allow their voice to be heard, where they're not shot down or where they're told to be quiet because they don't follow a certain political line of thinking, or where they dare introduce a policy that is not a typical women's issue? I want to talk about those things. I'm wondering about that as well, the non-traditional women's issues.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Well, it's interesting, because there have been lots of conversations about free votes and lots of conversations in support of that, but at the same time, there has not been support for people to be free to have their own opinion or to share the opinions of the constituencies and those they represent. I think that's actually shameful behaviour. I don't think that represents Canada and the democracy we live in. I find that to be very sad.

•(1615)

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: I have a question.

We've heard often in the last little while that the word "equality" has been removed from the mandate of the Status of Women. Is this true?

Hon. Helena Guergis: The word "equality" is in the mandate. It's very clearly there. This conversation goes on and on. I know the opposition likes to bring it up and raise it and say it, but the fact of the matter is that it is there. It is there.

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: Thank you very much.

Do I have any more time, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Yes, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: Okay, good. Thank you.

I'm wondering too, as we're looking ahead, what changes has the government made to women's programs, and what were the outcomes? Looking at what you've done in the past, what were the outcomes, and what do you see those changes accomplishing in the future?

Hon. Helena Guergis: Sure.

It has been noted that there have been a number of changes made. We focus more on the grassroots organizations so they can deliver concrete support to the women in the communities, but it's the most vulnerable women. Even to our Bloc colleague and his question, he was talking about the women we serve. It's actually the most vulnerable women in society that our projects are focused on getting to. There are lots of government programs out there, but this is very special and very significant—projects that help 10 or 12 women in one small community, projects that help 20 women in another community, projects that will help 30 young girls in another small community.

The smaller projects are more focused on taking them through the training, the knowledge transfer, the things they need to get themselves out of these really difficult situations that they're in. We know that the three pillars are all interdependent of each other. So you have to have that going on at the same time. Sometimes these organizations have two or three projects going on, sometimes they've done it in the past and they've moved into another pillar, and sometimes you can see those women moving through all of those different opportunities to grow as women get themselves out of these difficult situations.

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: So if I'm hearing you correctly, what you're saying is that this funding and the projects being funded are actually reaching women directly, as opposed to through administration.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Absolutely, or as opposed to another research paper. We've made a lot of changes. The money is focused on helping individual women. You have to identify exactly how many women you're going to be reaching out to, what exactly you're going to be doing with them. There are stronger accountability measures in place.

At the same time, it's not causing difficulty for the organizations. Lots of times when they were trying to receive government funding, a lot of the applications and forms could take a long time to fill out. These project application forms present a much more transparent and much easier opportunity for them to fill them out in order for them to be successful in the end. It's not a long, drawn-out process where they have to spend thousands of dollars to be able to fill out the application.

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: Is that the feedback you're getting from women's groups?

Hon. Helena Guergis: Absolutely. I've got significant amounts of correspondence, quotes, telling us that they like and very much support the changes we have made at Status of Women Canada.

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: I think it's important. What we've done is move into the 21st century.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Absolutely.

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: We're not in 1974 or 1975 anymore—

Hon. Helena Guergis: Absolutely.

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: —and I think it's important that we do that.

Congratulations.

The Chair: You've gone over time, Ms. Hoeppner. Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you very much, Minister.

Like Ms. Hoeppner, I'm very concerned about the voices of women being silenced. I think back to the National Association of Women and the Law, which lost its funding, and CRIAW, which lost its funding. Just yesterday we heard that Kairos, a group that has always been very helpful in terms of advocating for social justice, lost half of its funding, and they don't think they can continue to manage. In regard to those silenced voices who advocate for women, I think there is a vacuum.

I'd like to now ask a question in regard to the Auditor General, because fortunately her voice hasn't been silenced yet.

I saw her twice, once here and once at public accounts, and she summarized the gender-based analysis that was done by the federal departments as rather weak. She said that of the 68 cases assessed by the AG, only four had GBA incorporated in policy development, only 30 of the cases had some analysis done, 27 cases had not even considered GBA at all, there was no policy requiring departments to do GBA, and departments don't know when GBA should be performed. She was very clear in her criticism and came to the conclusion that the government hadn't done a good job, despite the fact that the UN convention, the CEDAW convention, recommended that GBA be mandatory for all government departments.

Do you think GBA should be mandatory, and how does Status of Women Canada respond to the Auditor General's criticism? When you saw that criticism, you must have had some concerns. What did your department do, then, in response to that very upsetting report?

• (1620)

Hon. Helena Guergis: First, I need to highlight yet again that when we became the government in 2006, we did start gender-based analysis immediately on the tax measures, the process for the budget process. Also, under the Prime Minister's direction, as of 2007 Treasury Board submissions are required to provide evidence of gender-based analysis, and in 2008 we issued another directive that all cabinet submissions will have evidence of gender-based analysis.

I can tell you that when I'm at the table as the minister and I'm discussing policies, when it's appropriate, I always ask. I always have the conversation about gender-based analysis.

With respect to the Auditor General's report, I highlighted in my speech that I accept her recommendations. Status of Women Canada worked with PCO and Treasury Board to develop an action plan on gender-based analysis, and they're in the process of implementing that plan. It's on the website too, if you need to see that actual plan.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: I'm glad that you mentioned Treasury Board Secretariat, because we had the analysts from Treasury Board

here when we looked at GBA. The analysts said that 10 of the 21 Treasury Board submissions that were reviewed were challenged, but TBS couldn't provide any written evidence of that GBA challenge. When we questioned that, they said it's done orally.

The reality is that there has to be accountability and there has to be tracking. It would seem that an oral challenge isn't sufficient; there should be proper documentation with written information.

Do you think that's unreasonable? Would you agree that there should be written and understandable accountability around this issue?

Hon. Helena Guergis: Well, I would say to you first that I appreciate the great work the Auditor General has done. I think it's important to highlight that she cannot see certain cabinet documents. They're not something she can look at.

I do look at cabinet documents, and I can tell you that not only do I raise it verbally, but I do see a gender-based analysis very often when it is appropriate.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: The AG rejected the argument that she couldn't see a great deal of the information, so I have some concerns about that.

In light of the criticism and in light of the fact that Status of Women takes the lead and that the Status of Women department is responsible for the training and the champion, what are you going to do in regard to the AG's assessment that only four of 68 cases that she looked into had actually incorporated GBA into policy analysis? What strategy could you develop in order to address that?

Hon. Helena Guergis: I'll highlight again for you that I'm the minister of state solely dedicated to status of women, and I take my responsibility very seriously, especially at the cabinet table. Again, I'll tell you that I do see it in writing where it's appropriate, and I do challenge, and I do have those conversations with my colleagues.

What I'd like to highlight for you right now is that when I came into this position, I was fully aware of gender-based analysis because I had sat around the table in opposition and we had put together some really good reports there, but I took the initiative to get a better understanding on gender-based analysis and the different types of policy analysis processes that exist. I did some significant research and even had the library do some great work for me and provide me with some further backup material.

What I discovered is that while Canada is praised for its gender-based analysis, we really needed to do a little bit more to update it and we were not as advanced in our gender-based analysis process as we thought we were. I took the initiative to speak with some experts, including one doctor from Simon Fraser who explained to me that while we have a small component of intersectionality in our gender-based analysis process, we could expand upon it and could do far better than we do.

I have given the direction for us to better our policy analysis process and to update our gender-based analysis process to include more intersectionality. I'm sure you agree that with our changing population, it is significantly important to do that. I know that your chair, Hedy Fry, is also very familiar with intersectionality and the importance of it in the gender-based analysis process.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Irene. You've ended your time.

If we wish to have one round—and I do have a full slate for one round—may I ask the committee to facilitate our doing that by going to three minutes? Otherwise, we will go severely over time.

The minister's here for an hour, and that would give us the one hour. The minister will leave at the end of our hour if we do a three-minute round.

Do I have agreement on that?

Hon. Anita Neville: How about four minutes?

The Chair: No, it won't work. A three-minute round is stretching it a little bit. The minister has given us her time, and she has to leave at that time.

Go ahead, Ms. Zarac, for three minutes.

[Translation]

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

I think that Ms. Hoepfner should apologize for being so condescending toward Canadian women. I believe that even in 2009, it is an honourable thing for a woman to stay home and look after children and bake apple pies.

Ms. Guergis, I find it unfortunate that a minister would not set an example and that instead of uniting, she seeks to divide. This Committee very much needed a meeting of minds, today, and you did not do what you ought to have done. There is a difference. Like my fellow Committee members, you seem to confuse partisanship and fundamental values. There is a big difference. People can have different fundamental values and still work together without being partisan.

Since my time is limited, I will ask my question. You spoke earlier about \$2.4 million that has not been spent. Yet you say you have 69% more initiatives than in past years. Why have you not spent that money?

[English]

Mrs. Cindy Paquette: Public accounts had a lapse of \$3.6 million. About \$2.4 million was carried forward into future years to be used for projects. The actual was much less.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: The amount was therefore spread over several years, and it was not a budget for this year. What was the budget amount for the year?

[English]

Mrs. Cindy Paquette: In terms of the \$2.4 million that was carried forward, \$1.4 million is for this fiscal year and \$1 million is for next year, for partnerships. Because we have multi-year partnerships, we need to put the money into the years in which the partnership agreements will need it.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Okay. So what was the total budget for this year?

[English]

Mrs. Cindy Paquette: Right now, it's \$31.4 million.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Okay. You said that you have 69% more initiatives. Do you have a bigger budget or are you carrying out more projects with the same amount of money?

[English]

Hon. Helena Guergis: It means there's a 69% increase in the number of organizations that are receiving funds to deliver their projects in the communities. It means that 42% of that 69% are receiving funds for the very first time.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Do you have a bigger budget to do it?

[English]

Hon. Helena Guergis: If I could just highlight also, I know one of our colleagues around the table had suggested—

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: I'm sorry, we do not have a lot of time to answer questions.

[English]

Hon. Helena Guergis: Do you want an answer? Do you want one?

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Yes, but I want an answer to my question, and my question is this: you have 69% more projects, but do you have the same amount of money?

[English]

Hon. Helena Guergis: We have a 42% increase in the amount of money for Status of Women Canada under this government.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: So you have more money. Are these transfers from other departments?

[English]

Hon. Helena Guergis: No. It was announced, I think in 2007, that the significant increase of money was allocated specifically to Status of Women, and it stays there.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: How much is it? I'm sorry, the total additional amount was \$40 million, is that what you are saying?

[English]

Hon. Helena Guergis: It was 2007—

The Chair: We're over the time, so I'll ask the minister to answer that question as quickly as she possibly can.

Hon. Helena Guergis: If I may, there is an increase in the funding and it's at its highest level now for Status of Women Canada. It's a 42% increase in the amount of money available to the grassroots organizations.

To touch a little on some of the comments you made in suggesting that I'm not here to unify... As a 20-year advocate for ending violence against women and standing up for women's issues, I was appalled at the insults and the personal attacks that were taken on me at the beginning of the week, at a time when we should be remembering loss of life and victims, so—

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Yes, I will have to cut other people's question time.

Hon. Helena Guergis: I have treated all of you around this table with the greatest amount of respect, and I have not attacked any of you on a personal individual basis.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Boucher.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Good morning, Madam Minister. On the subject of violence against women, we have to break the silence, we have to break the vicious cycle where abuse is not only physical: it is verbal and it is psychological. Breaking the silence means women standing up and saying loud and strong how much they have been abused. Breaking the silence means giving victims of every kind a voice without making it political.

I have always worked with respect for my colleagues, men and women alike. I saw today a political face that I did not like. We should not be dehumanized just because we are women and think differently. I think that today, there is still too much violence against women and we are not going to fight it by attacking one another. It is safe to say that I do not share the ideas of everyone here around the table, but I at least have respect for what these people are doing.

I have two daughters, and I hope that they will watch television today and see how disillusioned I was by this partisanship, because we cannot politicize the deaths of women, we cannot politicize violence.

From that point, Madam Minister, what has been done since you took office to reduce violence against women?

[*English*]

Hon. Helena Guergis: Thank you, Sylvie. I appreciate your comments.

On a whole-of-government approach, we've done significant things with the Tackling Violent Crime Act. We've put in place support for significant investments and policing because we recognize how important this is. We are supporting Sisters in Spirit. In talking about the agency-specific, I am quite proud of the work that we and our officials have done in this capacity.

There is such a significant increase and focus on the violence against women. I remember the pillars that were put in front of me when I came in. It was talking about women's security. And I insisted that this pillar be changed to say "ending violence against women". Coming from the background that I had, knowing that the Prime Minister had put me in this position, I knew we needed to

address this. And I know all of us in this room recognize that we have to do this and we have to do it together.

But the projects, I think, are the best way for me to describe some of the things we've done. For domestic violence, when you're talking about, let's say, second-stage housing, one of the projects that I really have a great appreciation for is something that's similar to what's being done in Europe. There's a senior woman who's been living on her own for a number of years, but she can no longer afford to keep the house. And she deserves to be able to stay in her home as long as she can. So what they are doing is this. Women who have come far along in this difficult process are actually moving in with these senior women. When women who've come from domestic violence situations are ready to turn that corner, when they're not in that volatile state anymore, their families are moving in with these women and creating a new opportunity for the family who has experienced that violence to be able to start anew and actually have that figure in their lives who can show them there is another way a family can exist. That's one of the projects we're supporting at Status of Women.

• (1635)

The Chair: Minister, I'm sorry, you have now allowed this question session to go one and a half minutes over time. I will ask you, if you possibly can, to please answer as crisply as possible so that other people can have a chance to finish this round.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Sure.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Monsieur Pomerleau.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Drummond, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Guergis, thank you for being with us today. I am not a permanent member of the committee. This is the first time I have sat on this committee, and I find the atmosphere a bit strange.

My question is a bit more personal than the ones that have been asked to this point and is directed at a person who attends Cabinet meetings and is able to apply pressure.

You say, and rightly so, probably, that you want to reduce poverty among women. Poverty is probably the most insidious form of violence against women. It is the reason why we do comparative analyses to determine whether women fare as well as men. Poverty is a major phenomenon.

Even though Canada currently scores high marks internationally, in a context where everyone is getting poorer, that simply means we in this country are getting poorer at a slightly slower pace. Our situation is not as serious, but it is no better. The proof is that the number of poor children is growing. If that number is growing, it means that mothers are poor.

One of the easiest and most effective ways to reduce poverty is to invest in social housing. Right now, billions of dollars are lying dormant at Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

My question does not take aim at the Conservatives only, because it was the same thing under the Liberals. These billions of dollars have been there for a very long time. What type of pressure are you able to apply, you who claim to want to reduce poverty among women and provide them with better housing, so that some money is spent creating a real and meaningful program?

[English]

The Chair: Minister, you have one minute to answer that, please.

Hon. Helena Guergis: That's a very good question.

As much as I want to highlight that we've made progress, please know that I know there is much more work to do. That's why I take great pride in the work I do at the agency.

One of the projects we're doing there, for my part, is Building Futures, which I started to touch on. These women have sometimes come from drug addictions and very violent situations. They go through an interview process to ensure that they're ready to turn that corner to come into this program in Edmonton. There are hundreds of women who come into this. They actually have housing on-site so they can bring their kids, or if they're single, they can live alone. They take their education at the same facility and they all work together. They have to provide day care so that they can take their course.

This is one of the things we're doing at the agency. These are the kinds of things in which, for my part, at Status of Women, we're trying to transfer that knowledge across the country and find those in each province who—including in Quebec—would want to know how they built this facility. Because the construction industry actually played a key role in terms of millions of dollars put in to build this facility, around \$7 million. They also built the apartment complex that goes with it. We know that we can provide them these education opportunities, but if they don't have a place to stay, they can't finish the program.

So these are the kinds of things we're trying to do for the most vulnerable women at the agency.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Pomerleau: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Irene Mathysen.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to pick up on what Monsieur Pomerleau was talking about.

Violence against women—violence against anyone, I think—can only be ended with concerted effort. It's a huge problem. We know that violence is perpetuated by poverty, the lack of affordable housing, the lack of universal child care, the absence of pay equity, and the inability of women to access employment insurance because they work part time. It all contributes to violence. One of the remedies, I think, has to come from government when it looks or creates policy. Of course, we're right back to GBA.

On page 15 of the departmental performance report it says, "In 2007-2008 a new requirement was introduced that federal organiza-

tions should ensure that their submissions to the Treasury Board are GBA compliant." What if they're not? Are there repercussions? Are there penalties? Is there an incentive for a department to comply if the government hasn't mandated GBA? According to the Auditor General, it's not mandated.

How do we attack poverty and violence and really address it without the levers?

● (1640)

Hon. Helena Guergis: Gender-based analysis is an important tool, but it is, of course, only one of many tools that can be used.

With respect to your comments about the 2007 Treasury Board decision that our government made, and the directive that was issued, it very clearly states that in order to receive the funds, the Treasury Board submission must provide evidence that gender-based analysis has been done.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: But the Auditor General couldn't find that evidence.

Hon. Helena Guergis: The Auditor General didn't have an opportunity to look at cabinet documents. So while she has done an exceptional job in highlighting where we need to make improvements... That's why we have the action plan in place that we do, which I encourage you to go through. I actually assume, Irene, that you probably have taken a long, hard look at it.

I'm not sure if you had an opportunity to speak with officials about each specific section of that action plan that was developed by Treasury Board, by PCO, and by our Status officials. I would encourage you to do that. So you can see where those significant steps are in place, because we accepted her recommendations and we are moving to implement them.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: I hope that is the case, Minister, because there are millions of women depending on us.

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen, you have 30 seconds for question and answer.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: I'm sorry, you've caught me off guard, Madam Chair. I thought for sure that I was over time.

The Chair: We've gone over a couple of times.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: You were talking about awarding funding to various groups. I'm assuming that those groups would have to do a good job of research to support their application. How do they do that research? How do they manage it now?

Hon. Helena Guergis: There are a lot of individual projects listed on the website. Each has their own different way of approaching it, obviously. For me, I rely on the officials to go through each one of the applications before they make a recommendation to me to ensure not only that it's meeting accountability measures that we put in place, but that it's a project that's in line with the three pillars, that is actually doable in their mind, that can be fulfilled. I accept the recommendations all the time. We challenge each other once in a while, but I will say that they are experts and they know what the process is to take them through that, to take them to that recommendation stage.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Quickly, there are just a couple of organizations you mentioned that no longer receive funding. For organizations that are applying for funding to support projects, with the new measures we have put in place, anybody can apply to do the work that we do now. You just have to follow the guidelines on how we do this.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Minister. Thank you.

Ms. McLeod, you have three minutes. I'm going to be brutal about this because we have gone well over the amount of time for the three minutes.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to follow up quickly in terms of the comments of my colleague.

We do have to remember that violence against women is not specifically with people who are suffering from poverty. It goes through all and every level, from wealthy through... I don't want that perception to be left out.

Hon. Helena Guergis: You're quite right. There are no borders.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I also really appreciate the support. In my riding a number of the initiatives that have moved forward are very important initiatives, whether that be with Elizabeth Fry or with some of the great positive feedback that I have had in my community with some of the grassroots' proposals.

What I'd really like to focus on right now is this. You've discussed the three pillars that make up the priority work at Status of Women. Within the context of economic security, because truly that is an issue, what actions are you taking?

Hon. Helena Guergis: Projects vary. They start at the most basic level of financial literacy skills to even those who have a small business. Especially in the immigrant community there are some significant projects that help those women. How do you run a small business from the very small level of business? We often talk about small and medium-sized enterprises. You hear of some with \$500,000 a year in sales and up, but we're talking about the smallest business here. Those are the women that these projects are addressing.

Some of the other things we are doing are things like CATA WIT, which I mentioned, to ensure that we can see more women involved in technology, and in addition to that, there are some other really important projects.

I'm going to talk about WEConnect, because WEConnect is focusing on small businesswomen, and this is about market access.

I will be quick because I know you like me to talk a little less, Madam Chair.

When you're talking about a small businesswoman who has decided to create a food product in her home and she wants to put it on the grocery store shelf, if she wants to do that, it can cost \$25,000 just to get one space for one item on the grocery store shelves. What the supplier diversity program does is waive those fees. You go through the knowledge, the training, and the mentoring and you become certified. Then you are entered into a database where the larger companies, the grocery stores, etc., the Campbell soups of the world, take a look at this database and commit to purchasing all of their new products, or 5% of them, from the businesses in this database. This is the project that we announced. I've asked and made it very specific that it's focused on those small businesswomen to give them the market access, to give them the chance to grow those small businesses out of their homes and into something a lot bigger than they are. That is significant when we look at the number of small businesses that are being created by women across the country. We know they are doing it at twice the rate that men are, and they're doing it for lots of reasons that I know we can each identify at this table at the drop of a hat. But that needs to be supported, and that's why our government is supporting this project.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

I would like to thank you for appearing before us today. I would like to suggest that we suspend for one minute to go in camera to deal with the report.

Thank you.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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