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Ms. Marie-Claude Morin

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• (1540)

[Translation]

The Chair (Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP)): Hello and welcome to the 35th meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Today, we will continue our study of improving the economic status of Canadian girls.

Our guests today are Andrée Côté, a Women's and Human Rights Officer at the Public Service Alliance of Canada, and Ellen Dubé, an Educational Counsellor at École Rosalie-Jetté.

You will each have 10 minutes to make your presentation, and then we will go on to questions from committee members.

Ms. Côté, you have 10 minutes.

Ms. Andrée Côté (Women's and Human Rights Officer, National Programs Section, Public Service Alliance of Canada): Hello. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to make a presentation to this important committee, which has always played a role in ensuring that women's rights are respected and promoted in Canada. I truly appreciate it.

[English]

The Public Service Alliance of Canada is the largest federal public sector union. We represent more than 180,000 people from coast to coast to coast. While the majority of PSAC members work for the federal government and its agencies, PSAC also represents workers in the private sector.

I have prepared some written notes. Unfortunately, the translation was not ready, but I would invite the clerk of the committee to share the notes with you as soon as they are available. I will be presenting a summary of those notes today.

The theme that this committee is looking at today is truly an important theme. The need to improve the economic prospects for girls is a response to the fact that girls still remain confronted with the reality of discrimination and oppression in their early years.

Incest and sexual abuse is often perpetrated within the family. We know that two-thirds of sexual abuse occurs in a private home, and most victims of sexual assault are assaulted before the age of 25.

Racism, Islamophobia, discrimination against aboriginal peoples, homophobia, and discrimination against young girls with disabilities remain endemic. At least one in 10 girls lives in poverty. I'm not advocating child labour here, but when girls or young women work, they often work for minimum wages, part-time, and in jobs without benefits and that are dead-end.

Young girls living in rural regions—about 20% of the population—often do not have access to public transportation. There is little, if any, child care, and important services are sometimes not offered. I'm thinking, for example, of abortion services in regions. Young lesbians and queer girls are often isolated and even more marginalized in rural regions.

The proposed changes to the immigration and refugee law being discussed in this budget will further marginalize and disadvantage young girls. Thousands of people now receiving medication under the interim federal health program will no longer, as of June 30, 2012, be able to access that program. This will surely have a very harsh impact on young immigrant and refugee girls.

[Translation]

It goes without saying that there is much to be done to improve the economic status of girls. All in all, the measures that must be taken to improve their condition are similar to those that need to be taken to improve the situation of women. We are talking about political and social reforms that seek to transform the systemic nature of violence and discrimination against women, including economic discrimination.

What needs to be done to attack this problem? We will provide some suggestions, which of course do not make up an exhaustive list.

• (1545)

[English]

One of the first things we would consider and find important is improving health care for girl children on reserve. We know there is a very high birth rate among aboriginal girls, yet it's very difficult having a baby on a remote reserve, and in fact it's dangerous. We know, for example, that first nations women in Manitoba are twice as likely to watch their babies die as non-aboriginal women. Also, about 20% of babies in some Manitoban communities end up back in the hospital with respiratory tract disease. Fewer than one third of the babies born between 2003 and 2005 in Hollow Water and Sagkeeng, Manitoba, received routine vaccinations.

The federal government has a really important role to play here because it's the federal government that is responsible for health care on reserves. Funding is urgently needed, and safe water is urgently needed. We know that there are over 100 aboriginal communities under boil water advisories right now. Yet the federal government is about to pass Bill S-8, the Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act, which will shift responsibility to reserves but does not provide the funding necessary for this change.

[Translation]

Another program that is essential to the well-being of young girls is adequate funding for early childhood education. Canada is one of the richest countries in the world, and yet we rank at the low end of the international scale in terms of the quality of our childcare and our access to such services. In Canada, over 70% of mothers with children under the age of five are currently working outside the home. Yet, only 20% of children have access to regulated child care spaces. Quebec is one of the only provinces that has really invested public funds in daycares, with its famous \$7 a day daycare. A recent study showed that the government brings in more money than it spends by subsidizing public child care networks.

Nevertheless, despite this evidence, in 2006, the federal government did away with the federal-provincial-territorial agreements regarding funding for child care services and replaced them with a benefit that costs a lot of money and, when it comes right down to it, offers parents very few choices.

[English]

Education of young girls on reserve is another key component of a successful strategy for economic prosperity. We know that the income gap disappears between aboriginal people and non-aboriginal people when university degrees are attained. However, only 8% of aboriginal people, compared to 22%, actually have university degrees at this time. So federal funding is urgently needed to ensure a better education on reserve.

[Translation]

With regard to employment equity policies, even today, seven out of 10 women still work in traditional fields: office work, education, social services and so on. The federal government's economic action plan and the Plan Nord in Quebec both contain two large projects that give very little to women because women are still excluded from the construction industry and major projects.

Employment equity policies need to be improved. In the budget that was tabled a few weeks ago, we once again see a step backward in terms of employment equity because the measures the federal government just announced will seriously weaken employment equity obligations for federal contractors.

Effective measures to protect young girls against workplace discrimination and harassment must be developed. They must be given information and help in exercising their rights. They must be given legal assistance and mechanisms for accessing justice. Once again, what do we see at the federal level? The federal government is attacking access to justice mechanisms. It eliminated the regional offices of the Canadian Human Rights Commission and abolished the court challenges program and the Law Reform Commission of Canada. That is not the path we should be following.

Pay equity is also needed. We know that, 30 years after the Canadian Human Rights Act was passed, women are still experiencing discrimination in the labour market and earn, on average, 70% less than men when they work full time year-round. In 2004, the federal government's pay equity task force recommended that a federal pay equity law be passed. Nevertheless, as soon as this government was elected, it announced that it had no intention of

following those recommendations. We believe that this is an essential measure.

We recently won a pay equity case for our Canada Post members at the Supreme Court level. The women had to fight in court for almost 30 years for this. Clearly, the current system is not working and is ineffective.

We must protect public sector jobs. Jobs in the federal public service are a good source of employment for girls and women, and the cuts—

• (1550)

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Ms. Andrée Côté: The current series of cuts will cause many women to lose relatively good paying jobs with decent retirement plans and social benefits. Often, they will be losing the benefits of unionization. The women who are left will be subject to a great deal more stress and illness in the workplace. We received a major report last week on mental health in Canada. There is certainly a link between working conditions and mental health.

Finally, we also support the recommendations that were presented to the committee members by the Canadian Labour Congress.

In conclusion, it is important to remember that Canada has made a lot of promises to the women and girls of this country, promises that became constitutional obligations in our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and promises that became international obligations when we ratified the United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It is time that Canada took effective measures to respect these rights.

Thank you for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Côté.

Ms. Dubé, it is now your turn. You have 10 minutes.

Ms. Ellen Dubé (Educational Counsellor, Rosalie-Jetté School): Hello. I want to thank you for inviting us.

I want to talk about improving economic opportunities for girls in Canada from the perspective of the École Rosalie-Jetté, a secondary school in Montreal for pregnant girls and young mothers between 12 and 18. I will address our point of view in three sections.

I will begin by talking about the economic situation of our students and the history of the school. The story that brings us to our school's current mission began in 1845. That was the year when Rosalie Cadron-Jetté from Lavaltrie, a widow and mother of 11 children, took in unwed mothers, as they were called at the time, and their children. A few years later, the bishop at the time, Monsignor Ignace Bourget, convinced Ms. Cadron-Jetté to move to Montreal to found a religious community that would pursue her charitable work. Rosalie Cadron-Jetté became Sister Marie of the Nativity and continued her mission until her death in 1864, after which the congregation carried on her work.

Almost 100 years later, around 1964, school services were offered first to the children and then to the mothers. At first they were taught the essentials and eventually they were learning to type, about the plastic arts, and home economics. Despite the commendable and charitable efforts of the nuns, these young women would obtain low-paid, under-valued jobs. That schooling would last roughly 10 years.

In 1974, the Montreal Catholic School Commission, which is now the Montreal school board, opened a vocational school specifically for single mothers. École Rosalie-Jetté was established in east Montreal. It offered general studies and courses in child psychology, nutrition and sewing, the plastic arts, and typing. Five years later, a child care centre opened. The complete program of regular courses, from the first to the fifth year of secondary school, was first offered in the 1976-1977 school year. Professional staff and student services were later added, which brings us to the school we have today in 2012. Future prospects are a little more encouraging.

Thanks to the diversity of paths we have taken over the years, our students can obtain a high school diploma, which opens the door to cégeps and possibly universities. The students can acquire the necessary skills to take a training program and learn a trade. They can obtain a training certificate leading up to a semi-specialized trade and join the workforce.

As far as post-secondary education is concerned, we know that opportunity exceeds probability. A number of the students drop out of high school and before acquiring the necessary skills to take a training program. When they arrive at our school, they are already behind in their learning. They are frequently absent, including for reasons related to motherhood and a psychosocial experience that poses many challenges.

For a number of our students it is very difficult to get a well-paid job that would afford them housing and decent financial support for themselves and their child. Jobs stemming from employee training and semi-specialized jobs offer average or very low salaries. Jobs obtained after earning a bachelor's degree are better, but in those cases our students end up paying back student loans for years.

• (1555)

Second, I will speak about the programs and subsidies that are helping us right now.

While our students are with us, they receive financial help from one or more programs, depending on their individual situation. We have social assistance benefits, family allowances, a program for pregnant students and a program for young students with children. Some of these students have the help of a parent and some live with a partner who is working. Breakfast is available at school to all of them and their children for 25¢. Free snacks are offered twice a day, and our used clothing store offers new and used baby clothes for 10¢ an item.

We have a foundation that provides assistance to the students who need it most. Most of them are receiving enough money to pay for essentials. Our challenge is to help them learn to manage a budget on a very small income.

Finally, I would like to speak about personal finance education and make a recommendation. Many high school students do not want to learn about personal finances. Our students are no exception.

They know that they have to manage their money but they cannot stand the subject. They are also at an age where many of them spend money to conform to the dictates of fashion. The adults who are in a position to offer them advice often have a tendency to pass value judgments when they see a mother with a new haircut who is late paying her daycare fees. It is very difficult not to reproach such behaviour, but doing so does not solve anything.

Most adolescents who become pregnant between the ages of 12 and 18 are already experiencing shame, isolation resulting from rejection, abuse and a lack of resources. They need more support that takes into account their reality rather than attempts to bring them onto one right path or another. They need their identity to be recognized.

In terms of a recommendation on improving economic prospects for Canadian girls, we believe, in light of what we have seen at École Rosalie-Jetté, that it would make sense to invest in personal finance education with a focus on specialized training for teachers who are open, inclusive and creative and on the creation of content adapted for this training, testing methods that respect the path these girls are on, and a participatory training plan.

In summary, we must make learning on subjects such as credit card interest, the differences between a personal loan and a line of credit, how to deal with banking documents received by mail, how to prepare an income tax return and how to manage a bank account dynamic and useful. Making students aware of these things at a young age can only help them to develop confidence in their personal worth and a conviction that they can access decent income.

That is all. Thank you.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dubé.

We will now move on to questions, starting with the government side.

Ms. Truppe, you have seven minutes.

[English]

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

And thank you both for being here today.

Madame Dubé, thank you for sharing the history of your school. It sounds very interesting. You're doing a good job with some of the girls there.

We've heard from a number of witnesses that mentorship is important to at least overcome the obstacle of girls not seeing themselves in non-traditional or leadership roles. There are some differences of opinion as to what extent or how Status of Women Canada should be supporting such efforts.

What impact do you think mentorship would have on their future economic prosperity and economic leadership? And what role do you think Status of Women Canada could play in that effort?

[Translation]

Ms. Ellen Dubé: You are talking about mentorship programs. I get the impression this is somewhat related to the relationship that a student has with an adult throughout her personal and educational journey. When I talk about training in the field of finance, I am thinking specifically about people specialized in the field who could develop a training program catered to young, sensitive girls who do not need to be reprimanded or told that they could have done something else with their money. I am sure you are more familiar than I with the expression “creative banking”. This would be a very appropriate place to provide this type of education.

At school, we have a tutoring system. Every student who arrives at École Rosalie-Jetté is paired with a teacher at the school for the duration of her stay. We rarely address the issue of personal finances at length and no one is really trained to talk about it.

If you ask me how credit card interest rates work, then I will tell you about my own experience, but perhaps it would be better to consult someone who knows more about it.

[English]

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you.

When the Girls Action Foundation appeared before us, they recommended providing mentorship and diverse role models for girls growing up; educating boys and young men to think critically about gender expectations and to promote equality between the sexes; and implementing and expanding programs that reduce gender harassment, especially in educational institutions.

I'd like your thoughts on this approach. And are there any other factors that you think should be considered?

[Translation]

Ms. Ellen Dubé: Are you talking about trying to improve the financial prospects for the girls?

[English]

Mrs. Susan Truppe: No, I don't so much mean the financial prospects, but more the mentorship and diverse role models for girls growing up, but also educating boys and young men so that they're involved in this as well from when the girls are young.

• (1605)

[Translation]

Ms. Ellen Dubé: Spouses who are still in a relationship with our students are always invited to the workshops we offer from time to time on parenting skills, for example. Very few attend because very few are present in the lives of these young girls. The few who are still around, work and therefore do not really come to the workshops. We see some on occasion, at the end of the day, when they come to pick up their partner and their child at the day care, but that is the minority.

If we invited the fathers or the new spouses of the mothers at our school—they are not necessarily in a relationship with the father of the child—we might be able to develop something. Very few of them

come to the school or feel concerned. Most of our students are not in a relationship.

[English]

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you.

Madame Côté, how can men and boys be engaged by Status of Women Canada to improve prospects for Canadian girls with regard to economic prosperity, participation, and economic leadership?

Ms. Andrée Côté: I think men and boys are engaged by most of the ministries of this government, and I would hope that Status of Women Canada would focus on the advancement of girls.

There are very few programs left that actually focus on girls. If you look at the data and the statistics, there really is a systemic discrimination against girls.

So I would really hope that Status of Women Canada remains a gender-based organization that focuses on those of the gender who are actually victims of discrimination in this society.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you.

I wasn't actually referring to Status of Women Canada studying men and boys; I was referring to their being engaged, so that when girls are young they also understand that it's not right to do things to girls and that girls should have a better life than what they have—not necessarily that they would now be one of our studies, for example.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Côté has 30 seconds to answer.

[English]

Ms. Andrée Côté: Of course, education programs directed towards human rights and non-discrimination in schools would be very helpful, so that the boys themselves find it normal that girls start integrating in non-traditional jobs, so that we actually stop using the expression “non-traditional” and they just become jobs for all.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now move on to the official opposition.

Ms. Ashton, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Thank you very much.

[English]

I'd like to thank both of our witnesses here today for your excellent presentations. My first questions are directed to Ms. Côté.

I want to thank you for providing us with such a comprehensive analysis of the kind of work we need to be doing across the board when it comes to truly realizing economic opportunities for girls.

One thing, as we go forward, is that we should realize the extensive cuts not just in this budget but in previous budgets relating to research around women and girls; in this last budget, the cutting of the National Aboriginal Health Organization, women's health research, the National Council of Welfare, the First Nations Statistical Institute.... The list goes on. We can reach back to the elimination of the long-form census and broader cuts.

Could you speak a bit about how girls in Canada will lose out as a result of this government's cutting of research?

Ms. Andrée Côté: Thank you for the question.

This is a really important issue. It has impacts in many ways. The cuts in the long-form census will have a huge impact on our capacity to implement employment equity, because employment equity is based on the market availability of women and the other equity groups—aboriginal people, racialized people, and people with disabilities. We look at their availability in the labour market.

So a lot of the information we need to have informed social policy in the workplace, at schools, and in society will be affected by our loss of knowledge of our social and economic reality.

The cuts in research also have an impact on our capacity to identify where the social policy gaps are, where the problems that are lived by different groups of women in society are, and then to develop policy options for how we can deal with them.

We have basically lost the Canadian Institute for the Advancement of Women in the last few years. I know they're struggling to survive. They used to do research and offer information sheets that would be very useful in the labour movement and in the women's groups and I'm sure in the academic setting.

We've also lost funding for advocacy. The National Association of Women and the Law has shut its doors, and they used to do a lot of research and make law reform proposals concerning how to improve our laws and policies in Canada to ensure that we respect and promote women's equality rights.

●(1610)

Ms. Niki Ashton: That's a point I was going to pick up on. One of the struggles we have, beyond not having research, is that there are few voices to call on to actually speak to the reality that girls and women face.

You mentioned in your speech some of the challenges that first nations in Manitoba live with. Those are first nations that I represent. We see immense neglect on the part of the federal government, and yet the organizations that speak out on behalf of these communities and that I have had the chance to work with have often now been silenced.

Just quickly, so that I can have time to speak with Madame Dubé as well, could you let us know how the loss of advocacy capacity in Canada will negatively impact the future of girls in our country?

Ms. Andrée Côté: We've lost dozens and dozens of advocacy organizations. Really, the changes that have come about in Canadian society and in the provinces have been the result of advocacy by women's groups. It is feminist advocacy that brought forward the need for maternity benefits and explained the existence of sexual

harassment and the problems around violence against women and so on.

By losing this feminist advocacy, we're losing the voice of women and the capacity to critically assess the existing policies and to propose relevant law reform initiatives.

This has been recognized by the United Nations. In the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, for example, we recognized the need of the states to work with and to support independent women-based research and advocacy.

So we're losing a voice, we're losing a capacity to address and identify the remedies, and really we're weakening the Canadian democracy, because we're losing a big part of our picture here.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Madame Côté.

[Translation]

Ms. Dubé, in your experience at your school and with the essential work that you do, I would like you to say a few words about whether socio-economic conditions such as reducing or even eliminating poverty, access to affordable housing and universal child care across Canada—of course Quebec already has such a system—would allow girls or young women to benefit from positive economic opportunities.

Ms. Ellen Dubé: Of course, all the hassles that go along with school, a lack of income, and trying to raise a child at 14 years old when they have no idea how to go about it prevent young girls from positioning themselves in society, determining their real worth and finding a job that corresponds with what they like doing in life. I am saying this but, at that age, people do not really know yet what they like to do in life.

Young people have to grow up very quickly. We push them a bit to finish their studies at around the same time as the other students their age. However, I think that is a mistake. We should let them extend their high school studies over a longer period of time without forcing them into the adult education system. They could then stay at the same school and get the same general education as their peers to help them to get into CEGEP or university, while still having access to all the services for mothers, for example, daycare.

●(1615)

The Chair: Thank you Ms. Dubé. I am sorry to have to interrupt you, but this round of questioning is now complete.

We go now to the Conservative side.

Mr. Albas, you have seven minutes.

[English]

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Thank you to our guests for being here today and for providing testimony.

I'd like to start with Madam Dubé.

My colleague, Madam Truppe, asked a very interesting question to Madam Côté that I'd like to hear your thoughts on. This is in regard to both men and boys and how Status of Women Canada can improve the economic prosperity prospects for Canadian girls.

How do we engage younger men and boys, from your perspective and experience, so that we help the economic condition of girls?

[Translation]

Ms. Ellen Dubé: I believe that, when you have a child, it is easier to achieve financial health as a couple. I am in favour of inviting the partner whenever possible, as long as the mother agrees, obviously. There are many reasons why the mother may or may not wish for her partner to be present. When a father comes to pick up his child at daycare, it is easy to see the tie that binds the child to him. We see that a unit has been created and that life is a little bit easier.

I was speaking about training to help young people manage their finances. Obviously, the fact that a couple is willing to participate in that training is positive. I believe that to achieve financial health at that age, these young people need all the help they can get. If the partner can help, then that is a good thing.

[English]

Mr. Dan Albas: I appreciate hearing about financial education. That is the same theme we've heard before.

What kinds of programs do you see, and what kinds of organizations do you think would work to provide these kinds of programs? What forms do you think they should take? You raised earlier issues of how to deal with credit cards responsibly, how to look at bank statements, how you understand how much money you have at the end of the month.

What kinds of structures do you think would fit into your situation at your school?

[Translation]

Ms. Ellen Dubé: We would have to start from scratch because we do not have any trainers who use that kind of approach. There would need to be funding to train people, implement a program, create evaluation methods, conduct a pilot project and then implement this training.

[English]

Mr. Dan Albas: You also said that you encourage having partners participate in certain functions at your school when the mother is in agreement. Do you think this is something they should do together, or is it on a case-by-case basis?

[Translation]

Ms. Ellen Dubé: When you say partners, who do you mean?

[English]

Mr. Dan Albas: You mentioned that whenever possible, and when the mother is in agreement, having the spouse or the father of the child participate in the activity supporting the mother—picking them up from daycare, etc. Do you think any kind of financial literacy should be done by them together, or do you think it should be on a case-by-case basis?

• (1620)

[Translation]

Ms. Ellen Dubé: I think that the fathers who are ready and willing to participate, should. However, in a group of a dozen young girls, there might be two fathers who are present. The other young girls do not have a spouse. In any event, I would include the fathers who want to participate in a course on personal finances.

[English]

Mr. Dan Albas: I appreciate your thoughts and feedback on that.

We heard recently from Action travail des femmes and learned that their organization, with the support of Status of Women Canada, provides information sessions on entering non-traditional occupations. This is something Madam Côté touched upon. I hope some day we don't have that label "non-traditional".

Can you provide any insight into what might attract or cause someone to not move into non-traditional occupations, just the trades, from your experience?

[Translation]

Ms. Ellen Dubé: Today, in Montreal, in 2012, I would say it has to do with a conservative mindset, the fear of the unknown. Recently one of the young girls who decided to become a letter carrier unfortunately failed the courses that would allow her to access that training program. She will have to choose something else. Most of our young girls choose rather traditional jobs, that are quite female-oriented, such as esthetician or florist. Certainly, education on other possible jobs should be considered. The girls are very influenced—

The Chair: Excuse me, Ms. Dubé, but I must interrupt you.

We will now move on to the Liberal side.

Ms. Murray, you have seven minutes.

[English]

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Merci beaucoup.

This is my first time in this study. I'm very interested in the subject. I understand it's a committee that's working constructively in the public interest.

I just want to pick up on a couple of your comments.

We're talking about impacts that get in the way of economic success for girls and women. You talked about the federal government's role in ameliorating conditions, Madam Côté. Some of the organizations that have been de-funded make it more difficult. Some programs have been de-funded. You mentioned child care. So those are some direct impacts.

But I'm very interested in the advocacy side, which you also mentioned. The statistics from 2009 are pretty amazing on the charitable sector: \$7.8 billion in charitable giving; 23% of families claim charitable deductions; 5.6 million donors; 161,000 organizations; and 6.5 million volunteers.

Does your organization partner with some of these 161,000 groups, and do they have an important role to play in some of the conditions that are in the way of girls' success, or to help facilitate girls' success?

Ms. Andrée Côté: Many of our members are certainly active in some of those charitable groups, as are many Canadians. We know that a lot of people give up their time to ensure that the most vulnerable in our society can eat and have access to housing, training, and mentoring. I think we rely very heavily on the charitable sector at this point. It's a good thing, but we shouldn't allow this to become a replacement for public services. I think there is a huge need for public services that are developed according to strong policy and research.

• (1625)

Ms. Joyce Murray: I agree with you—and thank you for your comment—but I want to stay on the charitable sector.

Ms. Andrée Côté: We're concerned about the shutting down of the voice—the advocacy space for the charitable sector that we're seeing in this budget and in current initiatives federally. When David Suzuki feels he must resign from his very own foundation because he doesn't have the freedom to speak...I'm very concerned about where we're going in this society, as far as allowing those who actually know what they're talking about to educate the public and the government and to advocate for good law reform.

Ms. Joyce Murray: We know that the federal government has put \$8 million more into the Canada Revenue Agency specifically to audit charitable organizations, and it has threatened major changes. Do you see a chilling in the charitable sector?

Ms. Andrée Côté: There's absolutely a chilling effect going on in the charitable sector. People are afraid to talk. It's very sad, because they are often the people who know most about what is happening on the ground, where the problems are, and how we can remedy those problems. It's a very scary prospect when we're shutting down democratic dialogue, discussion, and the possibility of citizens, via their charitable organizations, participating in the promotion of good policy and good solutions.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Some of these organizations, like the Fraser Institute, are actually doing economic policy work for the current government. These are also charitable organizations that receive foreign funding. So we're not talking about only one kind of organization. Across the spectrum, I think all of the charitable organizations are starting to be concerned.

Is it helpful to the efforts to improve the economic prospects of Canadian girls if non-profit and charitable organizations are less able to have input into public policy in Canada? They're certainly telling me that's the case, with the intimidation that's happening right now.

Ms. Andrée Côté: I think the answer is obvious. This is not helpful for girls, women, or citizens in general. It's very worrisome. The unions are also currently facing an attack because of their charitable status. There's a current bill to examine in detail the financial...the functioning of the union. That will entail a huge amount of work for us and take a lot of our energy. Again, I think the objective is to have a chilling effect on what we do.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Some would call it silencing dissent.

I think everybody in the room is interested in a positive forward movement for the economic progress of girls, but in any of these areas of public policy there are going to be organizations that are advocating and will be criticizing a government, whatever the stripe of the government.

Ms. Andrée Côté: That's right.

Ms. Joyce Murray: What is the outcome if organizations that are advocating for what they see is in the public interest are no longer able to raise issues that may be seen as critical of a government policy?

Ms. Andrée Côté: The outcome will be less good public policy, and policy that is more often influenced by the market, by business, and by private interests that have their own profit at heart, or possibly by other actors. But certainly it is not in the public interest to weaken the advocacy voice of the not-for-profit sector.

Ms. Joyce Murray: You've talked about advocacy, you're—

The Chair: Ms. Murray, you have just 10 seconds. Sorry.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay.

The question is, how does one define advocacy that should be shut down, or advocacy that is the *raison d'être* of an organization to improve Canadian life and the future? Where is that line?

• (1630)

Ms. Andrée Côté: We would hope that the constitutional right to freedom of expression be extended to organizations such as those, and that we recognize the need in a democracy for informed dialogue.

[Translation]

The Chair: I am sorry to have to interrupt you, Ms. Côté.

We will once again go to the Conservative side.

Ms. Ambler, you have five minutes.

[English]

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to continue along the same lines as MP Murray, with regard to some of the information we're getting from statistics.

At the beginning of our study we were all given the book, the sixth edition of "Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report". Every year the Government of Canada publishes this report, so we received this big thick stack. I wish I had it with me here today, but I have a couple of quotations from it and a few statistics I'd like to ask our witnesses about.

Maybe I missed it because I was chatting, but MP Murray mentioned some statistics on charities. I'm not sure where they came from. Perhaps they came from the same book, but if you could let us know at some point when it's your turn, I would appreciate that.

As for this sixth edition, let me just read to you a couple of sentences about labour market statistics. I quote:

Women in nearly all age groups were affected by the recent downturn in the labour market. Women aged 15 to 24 were particularly hard hit: their employment rate fell from 60.3% in 2008 to 57.1% in 2009. Even with this decline, they fared better than young men, whose employment rate dropped from 58.9% to 53.6% over the same period....

Certainly it's a pattern of concern.

Madam Côté, is this the type of data that would be helpful to you when looking at these issues?

Ms. Andrée Côté: Obviously we rely on that kind of data, and more. We need that kind of labour market information to address unemployment policies, and so on.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: We'd certainly be happy to give you a copy of this report, "Women in Canada". I think it might be helpful to you, because I know you mentioned you were looking for this kind of information.

Also according to the sixth edition of "Women in Canada":

The majority of employed women continue to work in occupations in which they have been traditionally concentrated.

You know, those jobs we tend to think of as female jobs: nursing, teaching....

But the numbers of women entering the non-traditional fields, which has been touched on a few times today, are increasing as well, and the report gives us some good statistics on that on page 127.

Do you think it's just a matter of time before these gaps close? The report shows we are moving in the right direction, which I find encouraging. That's question number one. Do you think it's just a matter of time, and that at least we're moving in the right direction?

As well, I have a question for both of you. Have you been able to identify reasons why girls are growing up to enter non-traditional industries? What are the factors that would drive them toward a non-traditional field of work?

Ms. Andrée Côté: Thanks for the question.

One of the factors that would drive the young girls, obviously, is good pay, because these are jobs that really pay much more than doing hair and selling things in a store.

There has been a slight increase. We've been working hard, as a women's movement, to ensure that increase over the last 40 years, actually. So the increase is slow, and the increase is the result of policies, of funding groups such as Action travail des femmes in Montreal, which someone mentioned earlier, and the CIAFT, Conseil d' intervention pour l'accès des femmes au travail. Those kinds of groups have helped train women, mentor them in access. But I think what's also really important in having access to those jobs, in what studies I've seen, is whether or not you have child care. Often those are jobs that don't necessarily have the regular nine to five hours, that

have a lot of overtime obligations to them, so you need to have access to child care.

For them to be attractive, you also need—

•(1635)

[Translation]

The Chair: I am sorry, but I must stop you there, Ms. Côté.

Ms. Freeman, you have five minutes.

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank our witnesses here today. Their presence is very much appreciated.

Ms. Côté, with Bill C-38 on budget implementation, which is currently under review by Parliament, the government is amending the Employment Equity Act so that it no longer would apply to federal contractors.

Given your expertise in wage discrimination, can you explain to this committee how eliminating this employment equity protection will affect Canadian women?

Ms. Andrée Côté: This comes back to the discussion we just had with Ms. Ambler on employment equity. The budget indeed proposes to eliminate in practice the contractual obligation. This obligation targets private companies under provincial jurisdiction that have more than 100 employees and that have a contract with the federal government worth more than \$200,000. They have to meet all the requirements in the Employment Equity Act. This requirement affects 1 million workers. It is very important.

It is thanks to this requirement, among other things, that there has been progress over the years. This has allowed women to access non-traditional jobs. Under federal legislation, companies have to adopt this initiative in order to get a federal government contract. Concretely, that means that the employer has to conduct a workforce survey. It has to assess and analyze its hiring practices and determine whether there are any barriers. It is not enough just to hire women. The work environment has to be welcoming to them. For example, sexual harassment at work has to be prohibited. There has to be flexible policies to reconcile work and family obligations, child care services at the workplace, and good maternity and parental leave policies and so forth.

It is not enough just to hire women. The culture at the workplace has to change in order to retain women and allow them to truly feel accepted and welcome.

The budget implementation bill is a step backwards. It includes a clause that practically eliminates the requirement for entrepreneurs to respect employment equity. This is unfortunate because it will truly compromise the progress that has been made and might turn back the clock on employment equity.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: You spoke about women who are mothers and who need daycare services.

[English]

Could you talk a little more about how important it is for women's economic prosperity, essentially, to have the right to choose, to have reproductive rights, to have the necessary accessibility to be able to make those choices? Could you elaborate on how that has an effect on equal access to work, equal access to good jobs, and to equal salaries as well, and the importance of parental leave?

My time is about to expire.

Ms. Andrée Côté: Yes, on that huge question.... It's obviously really important for women to decide whether they want to have kids or not, first of all, and if they do want to have kids, when they will have them and in what conditions. Child care has been identified by Supreme Court Judge Rosalie Abella as "the ramp" for women to have access to the paid workforce.

We know that good-quality child care is really important for women so they can go to work with peace of mind knowing that their kids are being well taken care of. As I said, studies are showing that publicly funded, good-quality child care actually pays off for the government, because they get more than they pay by having women participating in the paid labour force and paying taxes, and by having children with healthy development. We know that child care is really important for children from disadvantaged families. In particular, for immigrant children, it's a real boost to help them integrate.

On maternity benefits and paid leave for protective reassignment, right now the Canada Labour Code has very weak provisions to ensure that when women are pregnant or nursing they can actually be reassigned to different jobs that are safe for them and for their babies. We don't have paid leave under the Canada Labour Code when women have to stop working because of their pregnancy.

I think this was debated in the House just last week. Unfortunately, a bill was lost, but—

● (1640)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Côté. That is all the time we have.

That brings the first part of our meeting to an end. I would like to thank our witnesses, Ms. Dubé and Ms. Côté.

I am going to suspend for a few moments so that the witnesses who have just arrived can get settled.

● _____ (Pause) _____
●

The Chair: We are continuing the meeting with our second group of witnesses, two representatives from the Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women.

I would like to welcome Bailey Reid and Stefanie Lomatski to our committee meeting. This is how it is going to work. You will have 10 minutes to share your point of view, and then there will be a question period.

I turn the time over to you. You have 10 minutes for your presentation.

● (1645)

[English]

Ms. Stefanie Lomatski (Executive Director, Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women): I would first like to take a moment to thank the committee for inviting the Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women to speak today.

Additionally, on behalf of our coalition, I would like to thank you for taking the time to explore how we might make more secure futures for our young girls.

My name is Stefanie Lomatski, and I am executive director of the Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women, also referred to as OCTEVAW. I am here today with Bailey Reid, chair of our public engagement committee.

OCTEVAW is a coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to ending violence against women through leadership, education, advocacy, and political action. We want to promote a coordinated response to women and their children who have experienced abuse.

The coalition is built on a strong core value that includes working collaboratively to achieve equality of rights, fair access to resources and services, and social justice for women and their children.

It is our concern today that young Canadian women are experiencing high rates of intimate partner and sexual violence and that the impact of violence and gender inequity is creating a gender disparity in young women's ability to thrive.

In Ontario approximately 46% of high school girls report being targeted for unwanted sexual comments. Additionally, in Canada, we know that when young women enter university and college, four out of five undergraduates are victims of violence in dating relationships. We encourage our young women to attain higher education; however, we do not explicitly say that in the first eight weeks of their undergrad they're at high risk of being raped by someone they know. We also do not tell them that they will be guaranteed to earn less upon graduation because they are women.

We need to work toward giving our young women the message that we are concerned about their ability to be safe and secure and to have the opportunity to use self-agency. In order to create a cultural shift that will facilitate the empowerment of young women, we need to prevent the violence they are experiencing and to understand that women can be further marginalized. It is vital that we consider how racism, ability, and socio-economic status create layers of systemic oppression that build barriers between our young women and their chance to live a life of opportunity.

We'd like to start with our first recommendation, which is school-based violence prevention programs. When preventing violence, we need to have the strength to recognize that violence is not neutral, which is the concern that the current bullying campaigns in schools focus on. In our opinion, these programs are not deconstructing forms of violence, such as sexism and racism, but are instead grouping violence, and therefore deflecting accountability. When we speak of ending violence against girls and women, we need to accept that even at the grade school and high school levels, the beliefs about roles of girls and boys, men and women, are being maintained.

What makes for successful prevention programs? First, we need to make a commitment financially to maintaining and promoting programs that focus on changing attitudes. Second, the programs need to focus on changing attitudes over time.

To make substantial change, Canada needs to incorporate this learning into school culture. Young men and women still do not understand or value what healthy relationships are. Their concepts of sexual violence remain informed by myths—for example, that most sexual violence is perpetrated by strangers.

This is an issue that needs a national commitment. Within Ottawa we have seen the success of such programs as In Love and In Danger, a program that seeks to mentor young men and women so that they can build dialogues within their own schools. Programs like this use peer influence in order to make positive change.

I would also like to take this opportunity to make an important point about OCTEVAW. We find that it is vital that young women are provided with spaces to be mentored. It is also important to us that young men be included in making change.

• (1650)

OCTEVAW began engaging men approximately two years ago. It is one of our priorities, and we believe that a change in community culture is only possible when we involve men.

Recently, in fall 2011, we began our program called I Can MANifest Change. It focuses on engaging young men in ending violence against women through exploring such topics as masculinity, femininity, sexism, and sexual violence. It is a program that has hope and celebrates that not all men are perpetrators of violence.

I will now pass it over to Bailey Reid, the chair of our public engagement committee, to continue our presentation.

Ms. Bailey Reid (Chair, Public Engagement Committee, Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women): Thank you.

I'm also the executive director of an organization in Ottawa called Sisters Achieving Excellence, which provides literacy and mentoring for criminalized women. One of the most important things we can do to increase economic opportunity for girls is to provide literacy and mentoring programs for them. We can start this very easily, and change for young girls can happen almost immediately.

The Canadian Council on Learning found that Canada is experiencing about a 48% illiteracy rate, so 48% of Canadians possess skills that are below those that are internationally identified to function in society.

Consider that you are an illiterate girl. You feel powerless because you cannot read or write. Your sense of inadequacy may be heightened because you have a history of abuse, exploitation, or mental health concerns. Certainly you've experienced inequality simply because you are a girl. Perhaps you're a young woman of colour, so that increases the chance that you will be further marginalized and therefore illiterate.

According to Craig Alexander, deputy chief economist at TD Bank Financial Group, the Canadian economy could experience a \$32 billion boost if literacy rates were improved by only 1%. This is a mutually beneficial outcome: we raise strong, confident girls who can advocate for their needs and everything they need to access, and Canada's economy is strengthened.

We must increase the capacity for young girls and women to advocate for themselves, find equitable employment, and become empowered. We can easily use literacy as a vehicle for all of these things. The government must acknowledge illiteracy as a huge factor in economic access and provide funding to community literacy programs as well as schools. I know that education is a provincial responsibility; however, I believe that literacy is a human right and therefore a federal responsibility. Without the skills required to function in society, it is impossible to achieve financial equity.

Finally, our third recommendation is that we increase the use of gender analysis in all policy shifts. We believe it's vital for the continued and further use of gender analysis when we make policies in a variety of different sectors. We believe it would be a powerful statement to girls and young women for every policy—whether it be government policy, school policy, or health care policy—that gender analysis be part of our accountability system. If we are to create a more equitable society for girls and women, we must make advancements and commitments to critically examine how decisions will impact them as women or girls.

We need to recognize how policies impact the diverse women within Canada and ensure that all young women are provided with the same opportunities. For example, we need to be guided by our aboriginal sisters and create and maintain programs that provide equitable opportunities for them. It is necessary to show young aboriginal women that they are valued by providing resources, education, and health care.

Thank you so much for having us. It has been wonderful to speak and share some of our thoughts on how we can empower girls and young women. We want to create safe and secure futures for them, and it would be our pleasure to work with you on building a sustainable future and change for Canadian girls. We are always pleased to help advise and support this committee in policy shifts.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would simply like to mention to the committee members that, since today's meeting will be 15 minutes shorter than usual because of voting, the clerk has suggested that you could submit your questions in writing to her and that she would forward them to our guests.

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Madam Chair, could you please repeat the clerk's recommendation?

• (1655)

The Chair: She did not recommend but, rather, suggested that you could submit your questions in writing to her and that she would forward them to our guests since our meeting will be 15 minutes shorter than usual today.

We will now move on to the question period.

Ms. Young, you have seven minutes.

[English]

Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC): I'd like to thank you so much for coming today and for presenting and providing us with information on your work, which is very important. We know that violence against women, particularly for those who experience it, is certainly a challenge in being successful in the workplace—it's very disruptive and all of that.

I have to let you know that I worked on the downtown eastside in Vancouver for a time. I was a family, native youth, and child care counsellor. Having done that, and having witnessed a lot of violence in that particular job as well, it spurred me on to take children home, which is why I became a foster parent and actually raised seven children. I'm now a foster grandmother in my own home. So I do have some experience and knowledge of these areas of which you speak.

I'm wondering if you could follow up a bit on your good work and what our government is doing. For example, are you aware of the fact that our government has doubled the program funding for Status of Women in terms of the program funds you receive?

A voice: Yes.

Ms. Wai Young: In Budget 2012, we have stood firm on that budget; we have not declined any of that budget. Is that information that's out there for the sector and for the women and girls in the programs and services they receive?

Ms. Bailey Reid: Well, I think it's out there. I mean, there have been cuts as well—

Ms. Wai Young: Not in the Status of Women programming—that's what I'm saying.

Ms. Bailey Reid: Not in the Status of Women programming.

Ms. Wai Young: That's what I'm saying.

Ms. Bailey Reid: Yes, and—

Ms. Wai Young: I want to be very clear about that, because I think you as a sector, and as leaders in your communities and sectors, ought to know that this government supports women, has doubled program funds, and is keeping that at par. It has not been cut.

Ms. Stefanie Lomatski: I think we have a really strong relationship right now with Status of Women—

Ms. Bailey Reid: Yes.

Ms. Wai Young: Excellent.

Ms. Stefanie Lomatski: —so that's something really positive. They have really supported and worked with us to be able to create programs that fit both our priorities and what's actually needed, right? I can say that. I think our main point is that it is one sector, and Status of Women obviously is focused on supporting women. I think our larger point is that it needs to be across all levels, especially when we're talking I think—

Ms. Wai Young: Could we just stop for a minute there?

Ms. Stefanie Lomatski: Yes.

Ms. Wai Young: I have very precious time here—I'm sorry—and I—

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Young, I would like you to allow the witness to finish her sentence, please. I think that she is trying to explain something to you.

[English]

Ms. Wai Young: Well, I do have some other questions to ask, Madam Chair. Are you going to give me more time?

[Translation]

The Chair: No. I am not going to give you more time. I would simply like for you to allow the witness to finish her sentence.

[English]

Ms. Wai Young: May I ask my questions, then?

[Translation]

The Chair: I simply want you to allow the witness to finish her sentence.

We are wasting time right now.

[English]

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): A point of order.

[Translation]

The Chair: Yes, Ms. James?

[English]

Ms. Roxanne James: Just to clarify, if the person who is questioning receives the answer and is satisfied with it, she's in the position where she can start a new question. She doesn't have to allow a witness to continue. I mean, I'm quite interested in what the answer is, but I'm not the one who's questioning.

I'd like to put that on the record: that as a point of order, Ms. Young is able to change the subject and ask another question. She does not have to allow a witness to continue going on. In fact, it has been done by other members of this caucus.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Yes, I understand. Ms. Young did not allow the witness to answer the question. I just wanted to point that out.

[English]

Ms. Wai Young: Actually, I thought the witness had answered the question already, which is why I wanted to—

Mr. Dan Albas: A point of order, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Albas?

[English]

Mr. Dan Albas: I'm fairly new to the committee. I just see that we could get into a whole bunch of issues. If another member or even yourself would like to hear more on a particular angle, they're at liberty to use their own time, but I do support individual members from all parties being able to ask questions specific to their needs.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: I completely agree with you, Mr. Albas and Ms. James.

Ms. Young, you may continue, but I still feel it is unfortunate to cut the witness off before she has been allowed to answer the question. Regardless, Ms. Young, you may continue.

[English]

Ms. Wai Young: I take great exception to the fact that you've now stated that I've cut the witness off, which I didn't feel I did. I felt that I asked a question, which she answered, and I was ready to move on to my next question. So I take great offence to that, actually, from the chair.

Anyway, I apologize for that, because often we're in a situation where we only have seven minutes, and in this case I probably....

Excuse me, Chair, how many more minutes do I have?

● (1700)

[Translation]

The Chair: We stopped the clock, Ms. Young. You have three and a half minutes left.

[English]

Ms. Wai Young: Three and one half minutes? Okay.

We're always pressured, unfortunately, for time. It's not that I didn't want you to get into more detail, but I do have other more important questions....

Excuse me, does the member opposite want to say something?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Did you want to use up your time? I'm done.

Ms. Wai Young: I'm sorry, I just thought you might want an opportunity to say something.

Anyway, I wanted to ask you what you thought of the recent call for proposals to prevent violence against women in post-secondary campuses. This is a new program that Status of Women is putting out a proposal call on. You were just saying that you have a good relationship with the department, that the department has worked closely with you in developing innovative programs.

So what do you think of this program?

Ms. Stefanie Lomatski: I think it's excellent. I do not believe the minister has made the announcement of who has obtained the grants yet. We put forward an application and we have a very strong community in Ottawa in the violence against women sector. We were able to get all four campuses involved in some capacity and we are continuing to reach out. So we are well aware of the program and we put forward an application.

Ms. Wai Young: That's excellent. I also want to commend you for the work you're doing with men and boys.

Ms. Reid, do you have any comments to make at this point?

Ms. Bailey Reid: No, not yet. We're very proud of the work that we're doing with men and boys. We see it as quite revolutionary in Ottawa. There hasn't been a lot of work with men and boys in ending violence against women. So we're quite proud of our project and where it's going.

Ms. Wai Young: Do you think that this is an area in which the department has been innovative? Obviously, it's the majority of men that are doing violence against women. So that's a very interesting and innovative way for the department to work.

Ms. Stefanie Lomatski: From the conversations we've had with Status of Women, I think they have been interested in working with men and boys, discussing masculinity and what violence against women looks like. We've had conversations in regard to recognizing balance. We know that funding, unfortunately at times, does go in trend formats and does not always stick with an issue long enough to get something resolved and achieve sustainable change.

We are also encouraging that there be a balance in allowing a space to mentor young women, to be able to support survivors, and a space to encourage men and boys to discuss masculinity and engage in that change. Our coalition wants to ensure that we're supporting men through programs like I Can MANifest Change, while acknowledging that our young women need to be empowered because it's an inequitable society that they're growing up in.

Ms. Wai Young: We had the Girls Action Foundation appear before us and they recommended mentorship and diverse role models. They recommended educating boys and young men, which we've already talked about, and implementing and expanding programs to reduce gender harassment.

Would you support their recommendations in this area?

Ms. Stefanie Lomatski: Yes, I think so.

Ms. Wai Young: Thank you so much for your time.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Ashton, you have seven minutes.

[English]

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much, Ms. Reid and Ms. Lomatski, for your excellent presentation and for sharing the very important work you do with women here in Ottawa.

I was looking through the excellent handbook you gave out. You reference the importance of access to abortion services. Respecting the reproductive rights of young women is a critical piece involved in their well-being. But unfortunately, we've also seen that the current government has been willing to reopen the abortion debate and turn back the clock on women's reproductive rights.

As a young woman myself, and as part of a generation that knows how important—

• (1705)

Ms. Joyce Bateman: A point of order, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

The Chair: I am listening, Ms. Bateman.

[English]

Ms. Joyce Bateman: My understanding—and I really, truly want to understand this as opposed to getting.... I want to learn.

A number of us here are new members. We are all aware that there is a private member's bill. It is not a government position. The government position is clear.

Ms. Niki Ashton: This is not a point of order.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: But it is a point of order.

Is it allowed for a colleague around this table to make an unfactual remark about a government that has clearly taken a position against this private member's bill? I need clarification on this, because I really don't understand how somebody can say something like that.

Ms. Niki Ashton: This is a point of debate, and if we're going to debate it, let's find another time. I'd rather continue to ask the witnesses who have come here—

Ms. Joyce Bateman: I think the chair—

Mrs. Stella Ambler: On the point of order, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Ambler, are you rising on a point of order?

[English]

Mrs. Stella Ambler: No. I'm speaking to Madam Bateman's point of order.

The Chair: Okay, very quickly.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: I would say that the entire line that's been raised with regard to the bill currently before the House is not relevant to this study.

[Translation]

The Chair: I am going to try to put a bit of order in all of this. As Ms. Ashton said, the current debate could take place elsewhere. In my opinion, Ms. Ashton has the right to ask questions on this subject since we are talking about economic prospects for girls and whether a girl has a child or not affects those economic prospects.

Ms. James, please proceed.

[English]

Ms. Roxanne James: I want to speak to the point of order as well.

I'm glad you actually stressed that the purpose of this study is to study the economic prospects and leadership of our young girls in Canada. We have to remember, too, that what we decided this committee would study is basically....

Again, I'm saying it because it's really what the Status of Women can do. The Status of Women actually has no control over a private member's motion, so I'm not sure where this line of questioning is going. Obviously the Status of Women is not going to take a personal opinion or approach on a private member's motion that the government has currently said they are not actually supporting.

So I just want to reiterate...because we've had a number of witnesses come in, opposition witnesses from the other side, talking about lots and lots of issues that are of importance but are certainly not relevant to the scope of this committee's study, which is the economic prosperity, prospects, direction, leadership of our young girls and what the Status of Women can do.

I want to clearly state that.

[Translation]

The Chair: I hear you—

[English]

Ms. Roxanne James: I mean, the Status of Women does lots of funding proposals, and so on like that, to encourage young girls to succeed, but within the Status of Women we certainly do not get into individual debate on private members' motions.

I just want to put that on the table and make sure that's clearly understood by all colleagues around the table.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: I hear what you are saying, Ms. James, but I want to reiterate the fact that, for a woman, having a child or not has an effect on her economic opportunities.

Ms. Ashton, you may continue. Thank you.

[English]

Ms. Niki Ashton: Are reproductive rights important to girls achieving economic success and personal success in Canada?

Ms. Bailey Reid: Yes, they are.

Ms. Stefanie Lomatski: I think we also have to consider that it's much more complicated, too; there are also layers. Right now reproductive advocates are also looking at how violence against women and reproduction rights actually go together. A lot of the time, the victimization either starts or worsens because...whether that right is denied, whether that's by the partner or in some other capacity.

I think when we're talking about reproductive rights, we also have to realize that the existence of that right to choose and to have self-agency is always very important, especially when we're considering that sexual assault rates for young women are extremely high. Those women at the highest risk of being sexually assaulted are between 13 and...I believe it goes up to 25.

So to not have that right to be able to choose if for some reason they were to get pregnant is a really important piece of that whole puzzle in understanding what violence looks like in the lives of our young Canadian women.

• (1710)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Great. Thank you very much.

My other question would be with respect to cuts to research and advocacy. Clearly you're involved in dealing with the realities that women face in Ottawa, but you spoke about aboriginal women, for example, and the high rates of violence they face. Yet this government has cut the National Aboriginal Health Organization. Last year there were cuts to the Sisters in Spirit program. This year we saw a cut to the first nations statistical institute.

We're wondering how important it is to be able to support research that indicates the reality that young women face, and perhaps the importance it has in your work.

Ms. Stefanie Lomatski: I think ideally I would empower aboriginal advocates to be able to sit here and have that voice, to speak for their people and to say that it is important. We know this is the reality of the current system, what has just happened, and that any resources to those who are marginalized and those women who have the highest rate of sexual violence—and historical sexual violence. It's really important that we make clear actions, financially contribute, and to be able to validate.... The message is that aboriginal women are not validated, and that's a really serious issue, which I think we can always change and we can always work towards. I think if we're looking at marginalized women, both homeless women and aboriginal women, we need to realize the inequity that exists right now.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

It's a recurring theme we've heard, about how devastating these cuts have been, both to research and advocacy. That's why it's very important to have this conversation with the government. That's why I believe it's very important to have the opportunity to hear from the Minister for the Status of Women directly, given that we have heard about such a negative impact.

That, in fact, is why I put forward a motion to question the cuts to the budget. I'd like to put forward that motion right now, because I would like us, as a committee, to hear directly from the Minister for the Status of Women about these devastating cuts to research, advocacy, and employment equity as well.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Niki Ashton moves the following motion: That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2)[...]

I am listening, Mr. Albas.

[English]

Mr. Dan Albas: Are we going to be debating the motion now, or are we moving off witness testimony, Madam Chair—if you could just confirm that.

[Translation]

The Chair: I will read the motion first, since we have roughly two minutes left before the bells. We could come back to that another time. Would you like us to debate that at the next sitting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Agreed. I will read the motion.

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee invite the Minister for the Status of Women Canada to appear, no later than Wednesday June 13, 2012, to discuss the 2012 Budget and the 2012-2013 Report on Plans and Priorities for Status of Women Canada; that the Minister's opening statement not exceed ten (10) minutes; and that the Minister's appearance be televised.

Ms. Ashton, do you have anything to add?

[English]

Ms. Niki Ashton: I'd like to point out that on Wednesday, March 14, when Françoise Boivin, our MP, asked the minister if she would return to speak to the budget directly, the minister expressed very clearly that she would return. I believe we need to respect the word of the minister. The Hansard states clearly that it was on the budget. Of course, as we know, there are only a few weeks left, and we'd like to deal with that immediately.

[Translation]

The Chair: We have one minute remaining.

Ms. James, go ahead.

[English]

Ms. Roxanne James: I'm curious as to why the minister would need to come here. In the budget itself, I believe, with respect to the Status of Women, there was...in regards to more women and corporate boards and so forth. I'm not sure whether you've read the budget in its entirety, but I'm wondering what you think the minister will come here and talk about. We're all in agreement with that part of the budget. Obviously, it's important to have more women on boards. We've had a number of witnesses here, actually, confirming that. I know that's something the Status of Women wants to do. I fully support that.

I'm just wondering whether there's an issue, and if the opposition doesn't support more women on boards, and so forth. So I have to tell you, I'm a little bit...I'm at a loss for words as to why you believe the minister needs to come and talk on that particular aspect.

• (1715)

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Freeman, I am listening.

[English]

Ms. Mylène Freeman: With all due respect, I don't see why Ms. James would be confused, given that the minister herself said that she'd be very happy to come and speak about the budget. Yes, there is an initiative in it. We could talk about that. We could talk about other issues. Minister Ambrose speaks often about gender-based budgeting and the analysis the government is doing, and things like that. We'd like to speak to her about that, and she said she'd be happy to, so I don't see why there's any confusion.

We really should pass this motion as soon as possible; otherwise we will be running out of time with the budget. The minister herself again did say she would be very happy to come, so let's not squeeze her for time.

[Translation]

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Albas?

[English]

Mr. Dan Albas: I have a quick question for Madam Clerk.

Do we have witnesses on June 13? Is it an open day? I'm just reading the standing order on this.

[Translation]

The Chair: The study ends on May 30, in fact, so there are no witnesses scheduled for June 13. That answers your question.

[English]

Mr. Dan Albas: So it's not going to impact our current study.

[Translation]

The Chair: No.

[English]

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you for letting me know that. I appreciate it.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Truppe, you have the floor.

[English]

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

If we're doing committee business, we should go in camera. I can make a motion.

[Translation]

The Chair: Therefore, we will—

[English]

Ms. Niki Ashton: Can we have a nominal vote on going in camera?

[Translation]

The Chair: The division bells are now ringing. We will have to end the committee session here. We will have 15 minutes, during the next sitting to discuss the work of the committee.

I want to thank our witnesses for their presence today. This was a short, but interesting period. We want to thank them for travelling here to see us.

On that, this meeting is adjourned.

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