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Chair

Ms. Anita Neville

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•(1105)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.)):

Good morning, and welcome, everybody. We're here this morning to begin the last of our scheduled round tables, which is not to say there won't be more. I want to welcome the presenters who are here to speak to us today on global issues as they relate to women, both in this country and internationally.

We are on a fairly tight schedule today, as we have a minister coming in to meet with us following this round table. So I am going to ask you to please keep your presentations to five minutes, which will allow a little more time for discussion with colleagues around the table.

I'm going to go with the agenda in the order that we have it here and ask Liz Sarin if she would please begin. Welcome.

Ms. Elizabeth Sarin (Co-Chair, United Nations Platform for Action Committee Manitoba): Madam Chair, thank you for giving me the opportunity to appear before this committee on behalf of UNPAC.

The United Nations Platform for Action Committee Manitoba was established in 1995 to advocate for the implementation of the Platform for Action and other United Nations agreements that advance women's equality. Thirty Manitoba women went to Beijing for the fourth World Conference on Women, participating in both the UN conference and the parallel NGO conference. They returned to Manitoba with a commitment to see the recommendations of the Platform for Action implemented.

UNPAC supports the objectives of the Platform for Action by working through community action and with other organizations locally and globally for equality, development, and peace. UNPAC has organized conferences on a number of the critical areas of concern and has conducted a review of Manitoba's implementation of the Platform for Action in 2000. UNPAC began working on the women and the economy project in May 2001, in response to the fact there are considerable differences between women and men's access to, and opportunities to exert power over, economic structures in their societies. The purpose of the project was, and remains, to promote women's economic literacy in Manitoba and beyond, making links between the local and global economic realities that women face.

In June 2003 we launched our women and the economy resources, including the women and the economy website, the 26-minute video, *Banging the Door Down: Women and the Economy*, and a two-volume resource book. Since our launch, we have distributed 600

copies of the video and 250 sets of resource books to interested individuals and organizations in Manitoba and beyond. Our next step was to strengthen women's involvement in economic decision-making, with a follow-up project on gender budgets.

The gender budget project focuses on reducing women's economic inequality. A high priority is placed on influencing improvements to social programming for women, as well as advocating for a more progressive tax system. According to the Beijing Platform for Action, "There are considerable differences in women's and men's access to and opportunities to exert power over economic structures in their societies." Not only are women on average poorer than men, but they also have fewer opportunities to participate in public processes, such as budgets, which can improve their condition. The gender budget project will provide access to economic decision-making for women, which will in turn lead to an improvement in women's economic equality. The gender budget project is a direct follow-up to UNPAC's multi-year project on women and the economy. The gender budget project will provide a venue to affect decisions while continuing to increase women's economic literacy in practical ways.

UNPAC initiated a community gender budget forum in the spring of 2004. Over 50 women and men attended this event, and a wide range of creative and practical suggestions were put forward. Following the event, a list of 122 suggestions for a gender budget for Manitoba was presented to Finance Minister Greg Selinger, along with a letter urging him to make the budget process more participatory and to recognize that budgets can either increase or decrease women's equality. The minister was interested in our initiative and urged us to offer suggestions earlier in the budget process, including through the budget consultations, to contribute to the decisions on next year's budget. The interest from the minister, the forum participants, and the media, demonstrated that this is a timely and needed initiative.

The gender budget project will also build on the experiences of women in countries such as South Africa and Australia, which have been active in the area of gender budgets for many years. The first year of a multi-year project will focus on developing relationships locally, nationally, and internationally.

The focus of UNPAC from the Platform for Action in 2005 is: women and the economy; women and health, HIV/AIDS, globally; violence against women, particularly trafficking in women; women and the media; women and the environment; and human rights of women.

•(1110)

Canada has shown leadership in a number of international meetings, including the International Conference on Child Soldiers and the Ottawa convention on anti-personnel land mines. Canada has also committed to do gender-based analysis of its programs and evaluations.

UNPAC's role is to hold our governments—federal, provincial, and territorial—accountable under the international commitments and obligations signed by Canada. Canada's leadership is being sought in the review and restructuring of the Security Council of the United Nations. Canada is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Canada is also a signatory to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. This lists 12 critical areas of concern for women.

UNPAC has worked collaboratively over the years in the community with a diverse number of groups locally, nationally, and internationally.

Two recommendations are that Canada fulfill its commitments under the signed international agreements and provide equality-seeking groups in Canadian society with ongoing funding.

Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you once again for this opportunity to present this short brief on behalf of our organization.

I wish the committee well in your deliberations and look forward to your recommendations.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move next to the Needs Centre for War-Affected Families, Margaret von Lau, executive director. Welcome.

Ms. Margaret von Lau (Executive Director, Needs Centre for War-Affected Families): Thank you.

Madam Chair, honourable members of the standing committee, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to express my gratitude for the invitation. I am honoured to present the immigrant and refugee issue on behalf of Newcomers Employment and Education Development Services, NEEDS Inc., presently known as the Needs Centre for War-Affected Families, operating under NEEDS Inc.

Our agency was fully created, developed, and implemented by one immigrant woman and one refugee woman ten years ago, based on their own experience in integrating into Canadian society. In the first phase of the agency implementation we concentrated mostly on women's programs. In 1999, after five years of operation, we incorporated and became a registered charitable organization.

The biggest impact on our present capacity has been the International Conference on War-Affected Children held in Winnipeg in August 2000. Through volunteer participation in the conference, members of NEEDS Inc. learned that all of the issues presented at the conference exactly matched the profile of clients. This conference was an inspiration for the creation of the Needs Centre for War-Affected Families as a major program of NEEDS Inc.

in June 2001. Our major goal is to enhance the immigrant and refugee integration process into Canadian society through overcoming barriers faced by war-affected families and women.

Families are very important for the whole unit of Canadian society.

Until 2004 the agency was funded by the provincial government and the Winnipeg Foundation as well as through donations and fundraising.

Since 2001 we have served over 2,000 clients. We are pleased to inform you that in September 2004 we received financial support from the federal government to enhance our war-affected clients' integration into Canadian society through merging war-affected families with Canadian families as mentors. The partnership with the federal government is a milestone in the process of further development of our agency for the benefit of war-affected clients, service providers, and the community at large.

Madam Chair, honourable members of the standing committee, and ladies and gentlemen, immigrant and refugee women who enter Canada, the one and unique country in the world that accepts immigrants for who they are, are bringing with them their skills, values, beliefs, experiences, hopes, and dreams as their contribution to Canadian culture. On behalf of immigrant and refugee women, I would like to bring to your attention some of the issues where your involvement as the Standing Committee on the Status of Women is essential.

There are three major obstacles faced by immigrants and refugee women during their integration process into Canadian society. There is a lack of accessibility and opportunities for employment, education, and services available to women.

First is education. There are language barriers in addition to a lack of or limited education from their own countries due to war or the political system, where only a small percentage of women have an opportunity for education.

On opportunities for employment, there are a lack of defined skills; a lack of understanding of the Canadian workforce system; problems with expressing themselves due to cultural differences; a lack of equality, even in legal regulations; a lack of employers' understanding of cultural differences; and also a lack of volunteer work opportunities.

On accessibility to services available for women, there are language barriers—women very often depend on family members, on husbands and children; a lack of self-esteem; a lack of self-confidence; and a lack of trust due to past traumatic experiences.

In order to provide effective support to women, the family at large needs to be considered as opposed to giving individual support. Every aspect of the integration of refugee families is crucial. Every family member has individual needs, and we should remember that the woman's role in the family is essential.

I believe in new immigrant and refugee women coming to Canada. I strongly believe in their abilities, talents, skills, motivation, enthusiasm, hard work, and commitment to their new country. They receive a second chance in their lives to become who they want to be, to contribute to Canadian culture and the economy, and to grow together for the prosperity of our society and its people. I believe this because I am one of them, and my experiences have taught me that anything is possible if you just get one opportunity.

My name is Margaret von Lau, and I speak on behalf of immigrant and refugee women.

•(1115)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Margaret.

Maryan Bile, would you go ahead, please?

[Translation]

Ms. Maryan Bile (Member of the steering committee, Coalition nationale des organismes de femmes minorités raciales et ethnoculturelles francophones): Good morning. My name is Maryan Bile, and I thank you for inviting me. Today I'd like to introduce the Coalition nationale des organismes de femmes de minorités raciales et ethnoculturelles francophones du Canada. The Coalition unites racial minorities and ethnic Francophone women's organizations which work for the advancement of Francophone immigrant women across Canada. It defends the interests, supports the actions and demands the rights of its members in all spheres and in all decision-making processes. The Coalition works toward the inclusion of ethnic and racial minorities Francophone women's organizations in all levels of the elaboration and of the set-up of policies tied in with their priority issues.

Our aim is to encourage excellence in all areas in order to reinforce and increase the ethnic and racial minorities Francophone women's organizations' capacities. The Coalition's mandate is to be the ethnic and racial minorities Francophone women's organizations' representative vis-à-vis the government and decision-making bodies, to represent ethnic and racial minorities Francophone women's organizations in various decision-making structures, to ensure active support for the Coalition's members, and to positively promote ethnic and racial minorities Francophone women across Canada.

Our objectives are numerous. We want to encourage partnerships with the government and private sectors and to develop joint projects on the Coalition's priority issues. We want to develop and set up strategies that will help eradicate the various problems that Francophone immigrant women are faced with, such as racism, violence, poverty, mental health, HIV-AIDS, etc.

Here's how the Coalition is organized. An Advisory Committee is composed of one representative from an ethnic and racial minorities Francophone women's organization from each province. Member organizations alternate in the role of ensuring the coordination of the Coalition's activities. Every year, one organization is responsible. Every year, there are four meetings of the Advisory Committee and one national meeting of all members. We're still trying to recruit new members since some provinces are not currently represented. The Coalition's priority issues are education, economic development, the health of racial minorities Francophone women, violence, Canadian Heritage's Canada-community agreements, the rights of Francophone immigrant women, immigration and sponsorship.

The issues we have chosen this year are immigrant women's community economic development, access to employment and foreign credential recognition. We're awaiting support from Status of Women Canada and the federal government for immigrant women's associations, so that those women can enter the labour force. There are a lot of systemic and cultural barriers. So these women need the support of all levels of the federal government. Many barriers also prevent them from starting up businesses. They are new to the country, and financial institutions refuse to finance them since they have never previously obtained loans. So there is a lot of social injustice. The Coalition wants to protect them from all that social injustice.

Once again, thank you.

•(1120)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Shelagh Day, welcome. It's nice to see you back.

Ms. Shelagh Day (Chair, Human Rights Committee, Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action): Thank you very much.

I'm here today from the Feminist Alliance for International Action. As you're well aware, Canada is a signatory to a number of international human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which I'll simply refer to as CEDAW, but also the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the convention against racism; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the Convention Against Torture, etc.

One of the goals of the organization I work with is to make sure that Canada at home is in fact accountable to the commitments it has made under those international human rights treaties, and particularly accountable with respect to the promises it has made to women regarding women's human rights.

Despite the treaties and commitments that we've made, including being signatories to agreements like the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, the decade between 1995 and the present has been a decade of going backwards. I think it's very important that we understand that this is the case.

During this decade, the federal government has restructured its social programs and restructured its funding agreements with the provinces and territories. We've lost standards. We've lost accountability. We've lost billions of dollars out of social program spending at the federal and provincial levels. This has been a massive overhaul of social programs in Canada, and federal spending now is at the lowest rate it has ever been since the end of the Second World War. Our federal spending is 11.7% of GDP. As I say, that's the lowest it has been since 1949.

This period has had a harsh impact on women because of that erosion and diminishment of social programs and services. It's very important to understand that this is an equality issue for women. Let me just say a little more about that.

Canada's system of public programs and services has been the foundation for women's advancement in Canada. Women are still the principal caregivers for children, for older people, for sick people, for disabled people. When we have public programs, we shift some of the burden of that private caregiving to the shoulders of the state. When we have good public education, child care, home care, etc., women have more opportunities to be involved in paid employment, in higher education, and in public life.

We also create good jobs for women in the public caregiving sector; so over the last 30 years we've seen more women in public sector jobs with caregiving roles—nurses, teachers, child care workers, child welfare, etc.—where they've had job security, union benefits, pensions, etc. We've also had income security programs like employment insurance, public pensions, and social assistance that have softened women's dependence on men, given them more economic independence, and made them more autonomous.

Now we're in a reversal. We've gone backwards. We've diminished all of those programs, and as we reverse in fact we diminish women's equality. We diminish the opportunities for women. We push more unpaid caregiving back onto the shoulders of women. They're struggling to work and take care of family members. We stress their lives more. We take away some of the good jobs they've had because we're cutting them back.

We've diminished income security programs, employment insurance, and social assistance across the country. We put women who are at risk in more vulnerable positions, many of whom, for example, are unable to leave abusive relationships because they can't get adequate support for themselves and their children. We've put them in situations where in fact they can't get affordable housing because they don't have adequate supports at the moments when they need them.

So in fact we have a more vulnerable, at-risk female population now than we had ten years ago. That's despite the fact that Canada is in one of its richest periods ever. Since 1998, we've had surplus after surplus after surplus. In that period from 1998 until now, we have spent \$152 billion on tax cuts and tax expenditures and \$61 billion on debt reduction.

• (1125)

We have not chosen to use our wealth to re-secure the lives of women by putting money into social programs, into the direct services and benefits they need.

This is a decision-making process completely antithetical to the rights that have been guaranteed to women both domestically and internationally. Our economic policy and social policy is at loggerheads with our human rights commitments.

In January 2003 we were reviewed by the CEDAW committee, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The committee made 26 very important recommendations to Canada in the central areas of poverty, access to legal aid, access to the justice system, access to adequate housing, child care, and access to full employment, rather than non-standard employment. It was also very concerned about the lives of live-in caregivers, aboriginal women, and the situation of immigrant and refugee women in this country. Those recommenda-

tions, as far as we can tell, have had no response from the government.

One of the questions for us is, where's the accountability between human rights commitments and actual decision-making about social policy and economic policy? These two things have to be able to speak to each. Currently, they apparently don't.

I'll say one last thing and I'll stop. The finance committee has apparently recommended that the next budget should have more tax cuts. I want to say to you that this would be antithetical to the interests of women. It in fact will not help us. We need more money invested in the very things that the CEDAW committee has said to us are deficiencies in our human rights performance.

Women have a claim on those surpluses. We have a claim to make that in fact that money belongs to the women of the country in order to move us forward on the human rights commitments that have been made.

Thank you.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to have a round of questions from members who are here.

For those of you who haven't been before a parliamentary committee in the past, and I know some have, our process is a prescribed one. We have a speaking order, and it's timed. The question and answer session in the first round is seven minutes. I'm going to adhere to it as closely as I can today. I would ask those who are putting forward a question and those to whom the questions are directed to answer as succinctly as you possibly can, please.

I'm beginning with the Conservatives, and I don't know who's leading off.

Ms. Grewal.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for taking the time to come here, and thank you for your wonderful presentations.

My question is, this committee in the past has been inviting many organizations such as yours to identify key issues of concern to women. What would you identify as the top three issues of concern to women in Canada today? What role could this committee play in addressing these issues?

Women in Canada have made progress on a number of fronts over the past decade. However, there are many areas where women continue to face inequalities with men. What are the main obstacles today to equality between men and women?

The Chair: Who wants to start?

Ms. Sarin.

Ms. Elizabeth Sarin: In UNPAC, we identified women in the economy as one of the most key issues. To make absolutely basic changes, we will have to look at women in decision-making, and that's what we're trying to encourage. Violence against women was another issue that we said was really important, where there are huge inequalities obviously between men and women. And the third issue would be the human rights of women.

Those are issues where we're trying to educate ourselves and then reach out to others and try to lobby governments.

Thank you.

The Chair: Margaret.

Ms. Margaret von Lau: The most important for women is that we shouldn't look at it as a women's issue. It's not a women's issue. We have social issues. We have a lot of issues that together with men we should solve. Women, in addition, especially war-affected women, whom I am representing at this moment, have post-traumatic stress.

The post-traumatic stress is practically.... It's impossible for it to go within a short period of time. Fully integrating into Canadian society, for women or for men, is not only economic; it's also social and political involvement in the life of the country. But with post-traumatic stress, you are unable to study, you are unable to look for a job, you are unable to function, and any small aspect, even what you see on TV, what we see in a regular day's activities....

Imagine yourself, if you come from Iraq, for example, turning on the TV and seeing that maybe some of your family members are being bombed or killed right now. Are you able to integrate into society in this moment?

So I think we should look at many aspects—you as a committee. The mental health, the well-being of women is not only economic and global issues. We need women to be healthy and we need women to function independently. This is what I will ask the committee today to put forward as a major issue, the mental and psychological well-being of women.

The Chair: Thank you.

Maryan.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Maryan Bile: Women are facing a lot of problems right now. The government should take action on the employability of women and violence against women. They have more responsibilities, particularly within the family and in everything surrounding them. The family, work, stress and the climate especially pose problems. So they need respite service. If the federal government could intervene more effectively, particularly as regards violence against women and employability, that would be right. It's also important to facilitate women's education. The government should establish programs to improve women's employability.

• (1135)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Shelagh.

Ms. Shelagh Day: I think the main obstacle to equality for women right now is government decision-making. I think decisions are being made that, as I've already said, are antithetical to women's interests and are not advancing women. It makes a really big difference what governments in this country do. Government intervention in terms of social programs, social services, protections in the labour force, and so on are just absolutely essential to women's equality, and governments have been withdrawing from us.

That's a really big problem.

The second thing I would say is I think if women are not economically equal, we're not equal in any other way. Consequently, we have to really think about the elements of making women economically equal.

The third thing I would say to you is if I were thinking about where to start with the big problems that get put in front of this committee, I'd be trying to start at the bottom. That is, I'd be trying to start with the most disadvantaged women. I'd be trying to start with poverty, trying to think about anti-poverty strategies and why they're not working successfully in a country as wealthy as this one. We know of the women who are poor in this country. Women are disproportionately poor. And the poor women are disproportionately aboriginal, women of colour, recent immigrants and refugee women, single mothers, and older women.

It's really important for us to figure out how we can meet what I think are obligations we've made to women to give us economic equality.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm moving on to Madam Brunelle.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Good morning, mesdames. It's a pleasure to see you here today.

This morning I was reading the findings of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women on the fifth report presented by Canada, a report that dates back to 2002. I see the findings were quite tough on Canada, emphasizing numerous cutbacks in social spending. You referred to that. This leaves women and children in poverty, and the situation is worsening rather than improving. I'll definitely have a lot of questions to ask the minister later on this subject.

Ms. Day, I know you've appeared before a number of committees. I've had the opportunity of seeing you in the finance committee and elsewhere. In view of the scope of the problems, and the fact that, despite the recommendations, no progress has been made, how do you think this committee can make the government move?

[*English*]

Ms. Shelagh Day: One of the things that's been very interesting to us, one of the things that is baffling, is that as you can see from the documents we've given you about the CEDAW recommendations and then what FAFIA has tried to do, there is no government response.

So from my perspective, one of the things I think about this committee is that you could take on the job of figuring out why there is no response, what is in fact happening. All of these recommendations have something to do with various responsibilities of the federal government. Some of them are directly within federal jurisdiction. Some of them have to do with federal-provincial intergovernmental agreements. It seems to me extraordinarily important.

We have international human rights commitments. We've said we've signed on to these things, we will do them, every government in Canada will be responsible for them, and then nothing seems to happen when the committee tells us we're not living up to those obligations.

So it seems to me this committee could take on the job of finding out how the government is responding, if it's responding at all, and if it's not responding, then why not. It seems to me extraordinarily important.

• (1140)

[Translation]

Ms. Paule Brunelle: I'd like to ask Ms. Bile a question. Where does this need to bring Francophone women from across Canada together come from? Do the problems of the Francophone women you represent differ based on the region in Canada where they live or are those problems the same everywhere?

Ms. Maryan Bile: We created this coalition based on an organization that was already in existence in Ottawa, the Centre d'intégration et de formation en développement économique, CIFODE. We noticed that there was a national problem, that women were faced with the same problems as we were.

In 2003, we conducted a study to determine how they were living in each province. Were they experiencing the same thing as us? Was it different? Wherever we conducted the consultation, there was the same problem.

To come back to the Francophone sphere, we don't have the same needs or the same problems. All these women who have immigrated to Canada need better access to employment. Every day they're faced with a lot of discrimination and systemic barriers. That was the reason.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: I was told that at the centres that take in women who are victims of violence in Quebec. In my riding, in Trois-Rivières, it's a new thing to see immigrant women. I've been told it was hard to intervene with these women because no one understood the culture. I imagine you have to work on that. We definitely need a lot more information. With regard to violence, among other things, the cultural references are very different.

Ms. Maryan Bile: That's why we've established this coalition. We wanted to work together, to create more partnerships, to make the problems of immigrant women known across Canada. The federal government can support us in all these issues.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

You actually have about two more minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Good morning, mesdames. I'm part of the other Quebec. I'd like to know what you expect from the federal government as a result of all the cuts that have taken place over the past 10 years. What do you expect it to do for all women, for poverty, for children? What do you expect?

[English]

The Chair: Shelagh, go ahead if you want to do a brief intervention, and then I think somebody else would like to respond.

Ms. Shelagh Day: I live in British Columbia, as you know, and it's one of the places where you can see the impact of this shrinking of transfer moneys and the taking away of standards and designations that were in the transfer moneys.

We can say that right across the country one of the impacts of the changes in federal-provincial funding arrangements has been a real contraction and diminishment of social assistance in virtually every jurisdiction. Welfare rates have been cut. Eligibility rules have been narrowed. That's a direct result of what was done to the restructuring of federal-provincial transfers.

So is, for example, women's access to family law and civil law legal aid, because that was also originally designated, before 1995, as one of the things that the transfers were specifically for. You can see that when that designation was taken away, legal aid for family law and civil legal aid were eroded right across the country.

So women now in virtually every jurisdiction are having trouble getting access to that kind of legal aid. That is despite the fact that there are still specific designations for criminal legal aid, which is mainly used by men, while family law and civil legal aid are mainly used by women.

The Chair: Thank you.

Liz, do you want to respond briefly, please?

Ms. Elizabeth Sarin: I would respond briefly that the cuts have not only affected us within Canada, but they have affected our global image. We used to be leaders in human rights and programming for women, but now we have gone down globally.

We are now seeing families on the street. We are now seeing so many concerns with aboriginal women, poverty, and missing women. We need to do something with the poverty rate of women and children. They're not in isolation.

Thank you.

• (1145)

The Chair: Margaret, briefly, please.

Ms. Margaret von Lau: I have a picture here of a husband and six children. The mother is in the hospital right now delivering the seventh child. If we have cuts in social services, how can you prevent these children from one day being in poverty?

Any immigrants, even when they have employment, are unable to have the opportunity to support the whole family. If they go on unemployment insurance, how will they support the family? It's very important to remember that it affects refugee families that normally have, on average, from five to 12 children.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

On the Liberal side, who wishes to take the lead?

Paddy.

Hon. Paddy Torsney (Burlington, Lib.): Certainly, I think everybody on this side is cognizant of the need to do more, and that we should be doing better. In terms of the context, I think we need to be careful about what we say is broken. There are clearly some things that have changed over the last number of years.

While I would hope there would be different spending priorities, I certainly hope, Ms. Day, in particular, that people don't suggest women would not have been interested in paying down the debt or in some of the changes to the tax system that have also benefited them. I think if you look at most women who manage the family economy, paying down debt, as this country was experiencing, would have been a priority in terms of mortgages. Granted, assuming that all other things are paid for, that could be where there are some fine details.

It has given us choices now, and some of those choices can be to change the way we fund things. For instance, core funding was a change that was made. When we worked with the provinces on some changes in the early years, when some of us were elected in the 1993 to 1997 period, we were facing a situation of perhaps going bankrupt as a country. That was certainly the national or international perspective.

We made some difficult decisions. Now we're in a better place and can again make some investments. I do agree that in terms of social cohesion in some of the groups, I would like to see some increases or some way to do some core funding. The challenge is, how do we do that for groups? How do we pick the groups? Is it social planning councils? What would it be? Is it women's equality-seeking groups only? How do we invest, and in what format would you suggest that we invest to make sure we are paying attention?

I think those groups do improve the conditions for everyone in our community, particularly women and children, but they also help identify areas of need for other special measures.

The most recent report is discouraging in some ways. We've seen a reversal in some of the gains we were making on child poverty. The child tax credit program, which was introduced a number of years ago, is helping a lot of poorer families, particularly women and children. It's not necessarily helping the welfare moms in my province because they had it deducted, but that was a provincial choice. I'd like to see that changed. The different provinces did different things.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on that. We can agree to disagree or we can have a fuller discussion in the next round, but I would look forward, through the chair, to some responses.

The Chair: Ms. Day.

Ms. Shelagh Day: I disagree with you.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: On what?

Ms. Shelagh Day: On whether or not the tax cuts/expenditures and debt repayment have in fact been of equal benefit to women.

• (1150)

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Oh, I didn't say that it was equal.

Ms. Shelagh Day: Okay.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Let's be clear. I did not say that it was a bad thing for women.

Ms. Shelagh Day: Okay. We have a choice about what we do with this money, right?

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Right.

Ms. Shelagh Day: For the tax cuts that we've spent money on since 1998, for seven years, half of the benefit of the tax cuts has actually gone to the top 10% of earners. People with over \$100,000 have received half of the benefits of those tax cuts. That's not where women are.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: I was speaking more about debt relief, debt payments, but fine, I hear your point.

Ms. Shelagh Day: The fact of the matter is—

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Sadly, there aren't enough women in that top 10%.

Ms. Shelagh Day: There are not a lot of women in that top 10%—

Hon. Paddy Torsney: I agree.

Ms. Shelagh Day: —and they're getting the majority of the benefit here. There are some things that have been done, like tax credits, child care deductions, and so on, but in fact, those are fairly small if you look at where the money in the tax cuts or expenditures is going. They're small by comparison, so we can't look at that and say, yes, women are getting an equal benefit here, or is it in fact that the things that have been taken away from them are restored through the tax system? They're not restored through the tax system. We've fiscalized social policy, but we don't put money into the direct programs. We don't restore things through the tax system. That's one thing.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: You're right.

Ms. Shelagh Day: I think the debt repayment question is a really important one to think about now, because in fact we seem to be on the road of going on paying down debt. We have a promise now to have debt at 25% of GDP in ten years. It seems to me that we're going to go on paying down \$3 billion or \$4 billion a year on the debt repayment, but the fact of the matter is that if you look carefully at how this works out, we will get down to 25% debt-to-GDP without putting that \$3 billion to \$4 billion a year into debt repayment for the next ten years because of the growth of the economy. So we actually could do something different with that \$3 billion or \$4 billion a year.

There are really important choices here about how we're spending our money and whether it's actually helping us with the inequality problems we have or whether in fact what we're doing is making choices that are spreading the gap between rich and poor and giving better privilege to the already privileged. I'd say we have some pretty basic questions here, and women are at the heart of it, so I think it's really important to deal with.

I think the child tax credit is a good thing, but as you say, the poorest women are not getting it. In fact, 57% of single mothers didn't get the national child benefit supplement. So the poorest women are having this clawed back from them, and it's not just the provinces that are doing it; it's the federal government that has permitted the provinces in the way they've set up that whole scheme to claw it back and reinvest it in something else. If the federal government said no, you can't do that with that money, it wouldn't be happening.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Okay.

And on core funding?

Ms. Shelagh Day: I think core funding for NGOs is a really important thing. As you and I have said before, it's just an essential to the healthiness of non-governmental organizations.

I'm not going to say things about other non-profit organizations. What I know is that within the women's community, we can't really participate actively, I think, democratically, without core funding for some major women's organizations.

The Chair: We're going to go on to Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): I just want to make a quick comment about the budget. We often talk about paying down the debt as a panacea, along with trickle-down economics, which talks about how all this money is going to somehow make people's lives wonderful, and it hasn't happened.

The analogy we've used in the past is that it's like trying to pay down your mortgage when your foundation is crumbling. That's what we see, that we're actually accumulating a social and infrastructure deficit.

We've heard from a lot of groups by now and we have received a lot of reports. One of the things seems to be that we have enough information, so I think we're at the place where we're talking about tools that can actually help us make a difference.

I've talked about it before, but I want to talk about it again: gender-based analysis. The Employment Insurance Act is a really good example of a piece of legislation that adversely affected women in a disproportionate number. I'd be interested in your comments on gender-based analysis, given the fact that CEDAW recommended that we had mandated a gender-based analysis. We have a report that went to New Delhi that talked about Canadian experience in gender mainstreaming and talked about the fact that it needed to be mandated, committed, and followed up on.

You had an example with a gender-based budget, and I wonder, Elizabeth and others, if you could comment specifically on its usability as a tool and the factors we would need to consider if we were recommending that it were actually mandated rather than that it would be nice if you did it.

• (1155)

Ms. Elizabeth Sarin: From our program, we are asking for implementation of gender analysis of all government programs, including the budget as a whole, with a goal of making gender equity a reality. In particular need of gender analysis are the welfare system, the student loan system, and a gender analysis locally of Manitoba Hydro in order to show the impact on women.

We are requesting that all legislation, before becoming law, should be subject to a feminine analysis and input.

The Chair: Are there any other comments on this?

I'm going to go to Maryan first.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Maryan Bile: Immigrants are an additional source of wealth in Canada, if I may say so. Every time the Canadian government studies an issue, immigrants, and particularly refugees, who arrive here have to pay an amount of money. When you calculate those amounts, you see they are enormous.

Every day immigrant women are faced with poverty and isolation. Their mental health is affected by this. The government must carefully study both types of cases: those of immigrants who are returned to their countries, and those of the immigrants we take in. The government should support organizations working with women to eliminate poverty and social exclusion, particularly in certain particularly isolated communities.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Day, go ahead.

Ms. Shelagh Day: I think gender analysis is extraordinarily important. It also depends on how well it's done. I don't want us to think it's a sort of technical fix for the problems we're talking about. The real fix for the problems we're talking about is political will. Gender analysis can help us in terms of analysing what's really happening and thinking about the ways of dealing with it, but we really need political will behind a commitment to women for any of that to work.

I also think one of the things we have to be clear about when we talk about gender analysis is that we can't be doing it little piece by little piece, right? There has to be a place where we actually look at what the big picture is and how social programs and services fit together and what's actually happening in the whole dynamic of equality for women.

Just looking at one new piece of legislation in isolation, while it's a good thing to do, doesn't cover the whole problem, which is one of the reasons I think looking at budgets is an extraordinarily important thing to do. I think our basic decisions about where we're going politically are made in the budget context, so that's a very important place to be doing it.

I apologize for keeping on talking about this while we're sitting on our gender analysis of the last ten federal budgets. I wanted to be able to bring it to you today, but it's not translated yet. I apologize for that. As soon as it's translated, I'll make sure you get advance copies. I hope that will be very shortly. It's a very interesting, useful study.

The Chair: Who is it done by?

Ms. Shelagh Day: It's done by Armine Yalnizyan. She is an award-winning economist working on a grant from the Atkinson foundation at the moment.

The Chair: Under an organization's auspices?

Ms. Shelagh Day: It has been done for FAFIA.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

You still have a few minutes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Great.

One of the things that I know has come to the committee's attention is the recent decision in Newfoundland and Labrador around pay equity. In line with the United Nations—I think it's the 56th anniversary of the declaration against discrimination—I wonder if you would like to comment around that particular issue as an example of pay equity that we're talking about being a critical issue across the country; yet we recently had a Supreme Court decision that specifically said women don't deserve their money.

• (1200)

Ms. Shelagh Day: I think this is a really shocking situation. We distributed materials about this. I'll try to say it really quickly, but essentially what happened here is that the Government of Newfoundland agreed to make adjustments to women's pay to bring them up to the standard of non-discrimination. It signed an agreement with its workers, health care workers in particular. Then in 1991, before it even started the pay adjustments that would start to bring them up to that standard, it cancelled three years of payments and then delayed implementation of the pay equity scheme, with the result that women have lost about \$80 million in pay that was owed to them simply as a matter of discrimination.

They went to the Supreme Court of Canada and it ruled that it was discrimination for the government to cancel the pay adjustments and delay implementation of the scheme, but because the Government of Newfoundland said it had a fiscal crisis on its hands, under section 1 of our charter, it was justifiable in a free and democratic society.

I can tell you that the equality rights community in Canada is shocked by this decision. It seems as though the Supreme Court of Canada has abandoned women's rights on the altar of fiscal restraint. Equality rights, as everyone understands them, including under international human rights agreements, essentially mean that whether you're rich or whether you're poor, whether you're a rich province or a poor province, you still have an obligation to make sure that women are not discriminated against. So we have a Supreme Court of Canada decision that seems to run contrary to common understandings of what equality rights mean.

Women in Newfoundland and women across the country are now asking the Government of Newfoundland to pay back that \$80 million, and they're asking, as of last Friday, the Government of Canada to assist the Government of Newfoundland to do so.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm about to begin another round. I do want to advise members that Sue McGarvie has arrived now. We're waiting for Minister McCallum to come, so I'm not going to ask her to the table. We have a presentation from her that will be translated and sent out to all members. I'm sorry, but we have time constraints.

I want to advise everybody that there is a lunch here and you're welcome to come up and help yourselves. The soup is at the back—they couldn't plug it in up here—so help yourselves.

I'm going to go on to the Conservatives and begin the second round right now and adhere to very tight timelines. We are expecting the minister shortly, and when he comes I will bring this part of the meeting to a conclusion.

Ms. Yelich.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, ladies, for being here this afternoon.

One of the comments made was that you would like to see us support women's organizations. Which women's organizations are you citing? Which ones do you feel are very, very important to support? Do some in particular come to mind besides your own? You had mentioned, I think it was you, Maryan, that we must continue to support women's organizations. There must be some that you would particularly like to see supported. Can you mention, each of you perhaps, some of them that have done very well, particularly for women's causes?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Maryan Bile: I can mention the organization that's sponsoring the Coalition of Immigrant Women, CIFODE, as well as any organization that responds to the needs of women, whether they're immigrants or Canadians, who are faced with the same problems as we are.

[*English*]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I guess what I was thinking of specifically...I have met organizations that I feel are really, really worthy, and one of them recently was Community Living. That's not necessarily a women's organization, but I certainly find it to be a very valuable organization. That's why I was wondering if there are any specific women's groups.

Another comment made was—

• (1205)

The Chair: Excuse me, might I see if anybody else wants to respond to that?

Just briefly, Liz.

Ms. Elizabeth Sarin: I would like to see more support for grassroots women's organizations, aboriginal women and other organizations where there's an input of many, many volunteer hours but they are all working toward equality issues.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Yes. I wondered if you have any specific names. I agree with that, but I—

Ms. Elizabeth Sarin: For specific names I think a criteria would have to be developed, but I really like the idea of it being paralleled with volunteer hours.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Good.

The Chair: Ms. Day wants to answer that quickly.

Ms. Shelagh Day: I think one of the things that needs to be thought about here is what's actually in the budget of the Government of Canada for supporting women's non-governmental organizations. Currently, the budget for supporting women's non-governmental organizations is \$10.5 million. That's peanuts. That's the whole budget for providing any kind of support to women's non-governmental organizations.

I could give you a long list of very meritorious women's organizations, but I don't want to be put in the position of seeming to pick and choose. What I think is that in fact what we're doing is providing very, very little support for women's non-governmental organizations, and that's where the concern should be. I actually think Status of Women Canada does a pretty good job of trying to figure out which women's organizations are doing what and how support should go, but they have almost nothing to work with.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: It seems from a lot of the problems you mentioned today that we are on a downhill slide. Therefore, it does also sound like it goes back to 1995, when the block funding was changed. Would you all agree with that, that it was due to the changes of the criteria of the block funding? I guess where I want to go with this is, do you see variations in different provinces? When this block funding was done, do you think some provinces handled better than others the need to meet the needs that you're specifically wanting us to address? I am wondering if the federal government, besides giving more funding, should be more conditional when it does give these funds. I'm wondering how the relationship between the provincial and the federal government should work with some of your concerns.

The Chair: Very briefly. Margaret von Lau, you had your hand up.

Ms. Margaret von Lau: Yes. Practically, the transfer act has a huge impact on non-profit organizations. The relationship with the federal government in the past was very simple; all accessibilities and also accountabilities were provided and had a good relationship. The moment the transfer act came to life, the moment the provincial governments decided by themselves where the money would go to, a lot of organizations faced a lot of problems with the provincial governments.

It's starting to change, actually. For the last two years, it's a change for the better for Manitoba. We have a partnership between the provincial and federal governments, but I think we are missing the non-profit organizations. Non-profit organizations should also have an opportunity to present to their members to decide which organization or which group of people right now are in the biggest need.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're moving next to Susan Kadis.

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Actually, part of my question was already referred to, regarding the funding. I think there are members on this committee, if not all members—I don't want to speak for everyone else—who are very interested in some form of reinstatement of core funding after many, many groups have appeared before us. But we do need some guidance and some input as to how the funding formula can be formulated.

Again, I won't ask which organizations. I know it puts you in a difficult position. Of course, we're looking for your input now so that we can make recommendations that will help women across Canada. Perhaps, then, let's say advocacy versus direct services. Perhaps you can refer to that in some form to give us a little more understanding

of where you think the funding is best allocated, as well as to how that could be formulated. And perhaps you can give us a dollar figure, or a ballpark dollar figure, of where you think this should be, for our deliberation.

• (1210)

The Chair: Madam, if you could answer very succinctly, please, go ahead.

Ms. Elizabeth Sarin: I think I can respond very briefly; you did it before, you can do it again.

Mrs. Susan Kadis: For example, could you refer to an amount per group or per total funding, if that gives you any better framework?

Ms. Elizabeth Sarin: Yes, obviously, as I said previously, a criterion has to be developed. You will get many recommendations. The task is not impossible; it requires the will to do it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Margaret.

Ms. Margaret von Lau: I agree with Liz, but I'll say it would be an absolutely excellent idea if you would also include a non-profit organization in the partnership—and the core funding is absolutely crucial.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there anybody else, very briefly?

Maryan.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Maryan Bile: The non-profit organizations that have no basic funding. When projects end or an initiative ends, they tie in with another. So you can contemplate supporting these organizations because they are the ones that intervene with the public and that understand community problems better than the government. There has to be basic funding for these volunteer organizations working with the public.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Day.

Ms. Shelagh Day: Seeing that the budget is in a month, I would be thinking about the pot overall and trying to increase the pot overall, because I think the questions about criteria and so on can be worked out, but if there isn't an adequate pot there to actually support core funding for women's organizations, we have no place to start.

I'd be trying to get \$100 million instead of \$10 million. I mean, it's shocking to me that this is what we have to work with as women's non-governmental organizations in the country. So let's try to get some more money there.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to bring this part of our meeting to an end.

I'd like to thank all of you who have presented. As I indicated at the beginning, this is the last of our scheduled round tables. I expect we'll be doing further consultations as we move into it.

I thank those of you who have come from a distance, and I think that's all of you. Thank you for coming.

I'm going to recess for about two minutes to allow the minister to come to the table, and we'll be back very briefly.

- _____ (Pause) _____
-
- (1220)

The Chair: Colleagues, can we reconvene? Our break was a little longer than two minutes, but I think we can move forward.

Let me take this opportunity to welcome Minister McCallum, along with Cynthia Binnington. We've been waiting to have you before the committee and we look forward to hearing from you.

I know a number of my colleagues have questions to ask, so I'll turn it over to you.

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Revenue): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm very happy to be here today with Cynthia Binnington, who is a member of the PCO team, which is the secretariat for the expenditure review committee.

What I would like to do is spend not more than five minutes talking about the philosophy or the thinking behind expenditure review, the process, and also the gender aspects, which I know are of central importance to the committee. Then I'll turn it over to Cynthia, who's well qualified to talk about this, because not only is she a member of the PCO secretariat, but she was formerly vice-president for employment equity at the human resources management agency. She can tell you more directly about the processes that were followed within the secretariat on gender issues.

Basically, the idea of the expenditure review committee is that we wish to begin what one might call a cultural shift in the way Ottawa does business, in the sense that each and every year we would have a process whereby expenditures are reallocated from lower-priority areas or from areas that are inefficient into smarter spending areas that are things Canadians really care about.

There are two phases in this work. Phase one, which we are seized of at the moment, is to find \$12 billion in savings over the next five years that can be reallocated to priority areas. We have five years in which to find the \$12 billion, but I'm hoping we will find a significant fraction of that in time for the budget next year.

[*Translation*]

It is important to emphasize that it's not a matter of reducing the size of government. The size of government will remain unchanged. This is a question of reallocating resources from some less priority areas to priority areas.

[*English*]

So it's not like the program review of the nineties, when the government, faced with a fiscal crisis, reduced the size of government. Here we're leaving the size of government unchanged; it's a process of reallocating expenditures.

I would also comment briefly on the process. The expenditure review committee has been meeting weekly on this matter. I have had, I believe, no less than 17 members, with various combinations of the Liberal caucus, including the women's caucus. I've met with

the Senate and House finance committees, and now I'm pleased to be here at this committee.

The details will come out in the budget, so there will be intense parliamentary scrutiny post-budget of what we do, along with all the other items that are contained in the budget.

I don't want to take too much time. That's, in a way, the essence of it.

Of course, I'm happy to answer any questions you may have, but on the gender issue, I was certainly sensitized to this matter when I visited women's caucus and at other times, and we are clearly intent on applying a gender lens to our decision-making process. I've discussed this in the committee, and Cynthia will elaborate on how this takes place at the ground level.

Another point you might wish to know is that there's only a subset of government expenditures we are considering as the base from which to find savings. There's a large component of government spending of importance to women that we are not touching at all, and here I refer to the EI program. We're not touching anything at all to do with the EI program, certainly not maternity, parental, and sickness benefits or compassionate care benefits, in fact nothing at all to do with the EI program nor anything at all to do with the seniors program. In fact, we're not touching any of the major transfers to persons or to provinces. Our focus is on departmental spending, which adds up to approximately \$42 billion per year.

I've given you a very brief outline of what I see as the philosophy behind our work, along with certain key elements of the process, and I now ask Cynthia Binnington to describe, at the secretariat level, the processes that are followed in her work.

Cynthia.

- (1225)

Mrs. Cynthia Binnington (Privy Council Officer, Expenditure Review Committee, Privy Council Office): Thank you, Minister.

[*Translation*]

Hello. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to take part in the discussion.

[*English*]

I'd like to just speak briefly, if I could, about the way we've approached the work within the secretariat.

We're a very small team. When I joined the team in early October, coming from my previous position, I brought with me a certain sort of knowledge and sensitivity to a range of issues related to gender issues particularly but also to members of the equity community generally.

When we came over it was very clear that what we would be doing would be reviewing and responding to a series of proposals or recommendations deputy ministers had been invited to put forward. In them they identified program areas and program management efficiencies that would be really their lowest priorities or things that weren't working particularly well as needs of government had changed. For a long time people have moved forward with new proposals; it's not very often they take old programs off the table.

One of the instructions I received in terms of reviewing the proposals very early on was to ensure that any of the suggestions for changes that were made really constituted good public policy. I've had the opportunity to be responsible for all of the main departmental submissions, to review them, to discuss them with deputies, and to prepare the presentations for ministers.

A number of departments have put forward proposals, but not all of them have been recommended to the members of the expenditure review committee. They've seen them all. It was a long and complete list because it was based on the advice of deputies. But not all of the items that have been put forward have been identified as probable candidates.

I reviewed the proposals, and if we had questions about what was contained within them, we generally went back to departments just to make certain we had a good sense of what was in them.

We always looked at them from a horizontal perspective as well. We looked very systematically and carefully for issues that impacted on women or gender generally, particularly around programs and services to a particular community, and/or that impacted on women in terms of the workforce.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to go to a round of questioning.

Ms. Yelich.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Thank you.

Thank you very much for being here this morning. I really appreciate that.

I just find it very interesting that you don't have to touch the size of government. That's probably a shock to the nation. When you say that, don't you think there are places that can be cut in the size of the government? I'm surprised. There seems to be so much bureaucracy when people are dealing with government, and I'm just surprised that you don't have to change that and that you're reallocating the expenditures.

When you do review these programs, how exactly do you decide? For example, official languages wasn't cut at all. It was protected from any cutbacks. So who makes these decisions and how do you make them? How can you just decide you're not going to touch one area at all? There are very many areas, and I'm wondering, what other areas have you not touched?

• (1230)

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you for that question.

On the size of government, we are seeking \$12 billion in savings, which means reduced government expenditures. One of the areas we're going after most strongly is administrative superstructure. We're finding efficiencies in the administration of government and in the delivery of the programs. So in terms of you saying it's a lot of bureaucracy, I'm not sure I'd use exactly that language, but certainly what you've said is in the spirit of our seeking funds.

The next question is on what we do with the funds we save. We will save \$12 billion over five years eventually—we have seven years to find that money—and we want to make this a permanent institution of government so that each and every year we have

savings. Those savings could be used to lower taxes, reduce debt, or be put into priority spending areas of Canadians. This time around, the government has decided to put those into the commitments we made in the election platform, notably health care, child care, and the cities agenda—cities and communities.

Now at some future time down the road the savings we obtain through expenditure review could be directed to lower taxes or to reduce debt, but at this time we are actively seeking out measures to improve government efficiency. We're using the proceeds to fund areas of high priority for Canadians, like health care, child care, and the cities agenda.

On your second question, official languages were not excluded. Nothing was excluded. Every department was asked to provide to the expenditure review committee the 5% of their expenditures that were the lowest priorities. In addition, the secretariat and the committee had other ideas that we put on the table. So the total menu of choice, if you will, included offerings from all of these departments, without exception, but that was more money than we needed, so then we could choose.

Finally, on your question of how do we choose, we have much consultation with caucus, as I've mentioned, and with parliamentary committees such as this one, and we hear the views of parliamentarians. We apply various lenses to our deliberations. One is the gender lens, which was mentioned, but there's also a regional lens and other lenses. We apply all of these processes, come to a consensus, and recommend to the Prime Minister. So ultimately it's not my decision. It will go to the cabinet and the Prime Minister, but after this fairly consultative and lengthy process of arriving at those recommendations.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Brunelle.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Hello, minister. I'm pleased to meet you. Hello, madam.

As a Quebec Francophone woman, I definitely won't agree with the cutbacks in the area of official languages or with tax cuts. Instead, budgets should be increased in order to solve all the social problems in Canada which we've heard about in this committee.

Canada signed a convention at the Beijing meeting. A report was issued by the committee's observatory on that convention. The report was quite hard on Canada because of the 1995 budget cuts, among other things. As a result of those cuts, women and children in this country were placed in difficult situations. The committee's report expresses the need for the Canadian government to really reengage financially with groups in order to fight violence against women and poverty.

As you will agree, the Status of Women budget is very modest relative to the other budgets of this government. The groups ask us whether you have the political will to help them in order to prevent the situation from continuing to deteriorate in Canada.

Hon. John McCallum: This may just be a comment, but I can tell you that, with regard to the first two points and official languages, I've said that there was no exception. Everyone had to present their cuts. But we didn't accept them all, and we heard a lot of comments on the importance of official languages.

As to tax cuts and the other question you asked, there's a division of duties. I'm concerned with receiving saved money, but not with spending it. It's probably more pleasant to spend, but I just amass money. I have no right of review over how the amounts that I obtain from the departments are used. It's up to Mr. Goodale, the Finance Minister, to decide in his budget how to spend those funds. I believe Mr. Goodale is very sensitive to your remarks. However, my role is not to decide how the government will spend those funds, but rather to receive money.

A voice: I have nothing to add.

• (1235)

Ms. Paule Brunelle: But a man like you must carry some weight in Cabinet, and I believe that the women and children of this country will count on you to defend your interests.

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you very much, madam.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Powers.

Mr. Russ Powers (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, Lib.): I'll preface my remarks by thanking Julie for providing us with the background information on the purpose of the minister's committee.

John, I'm grateful for your regular updates, particularly to those of us in the Liberal Party you're frequently consulting with. Every time you do this, there's new information. What's nice is the fact that there are areas that have been targeted as untouchables, and these are things that are important, I think, for a lot of us around the table.

Can either you or Ms. Binnington provide us with something more with regard to this gender lens you're talking about? Obviously, from this committee's standpoint, it bears a lot of importance. Can we go into a little bit more detail about how that is being utilized to view the situation?

Hon. John McCallum: I'll comment at the general level and then turn it over to Cynthia.

What I have done is I have said it is important to apply this lens, and when we look at the submissions that come forward to us, it is important to see them through that lens, as well as other lenses. But in terms of the really important stuff of actually analyzing in detail what comes up from the departments, that is more what the secretariat has been doing.

Perhaps, Cynthia, you would like to comment on that.

Mrs. Cynthia Binnington: We've received the submissions and very quickly reviewed them, and then we met with representatives of each department. When there was an issue that touched on gender issues or that we felt could possibly impact on gender—even if on the face of it, it wasn't particularly mentioned—we ensured that in our analysis and as part of the information-gathering stage, we identified to ministers any consequences related to that.

As the minister mentioned earlier, we asked departments to identify the lowest 5% of their activities—but that was for information—from which the discussion could then take place with the expenditure review committee. It was initially with the review with departments, and later with ministers and the committee itself, based on the consultations Minister McCallum has been directly engaged in.

Mr. Russ Powers: Before I pass this off to my colleagues, I think there would probably be no surprise that in the dialogue we've been having internally since October, I believe there is probably unanimity around the table that very clearly, the gender-based analysis component of it is not only important to us here, but I think it is also important in the programming. So I'm sure you'll hear more from this committee, if you haven't already heard from us.

• (1240)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you for coming before us today. I really appreciate that.

I have a couple of quick comments and a question. First of all, it's very important as a country that we maintain official languages and support the official languages. It's something that is important to the whole confederation. I think it's cold comfort, though, when we talk about the gender lens. The employment insurance act changes are an example of a piece of legislation that had radical impacts on women. When you talk about gender lens, I don't have a great deal of comfort because you're asking people within the system to make decisions around that. We know it's systemic and that what we haven't done is a really good job of educating people or mandating gender-based analysis. Your comments are very broad, so I'm not having a lot of comfort that the gender lens is actually being applied.

The second piece I'd like you to comment on is this. Ms. Binnington, you talked about good public policy. I'm not clear what good public policy looks like, given the kinds of things we've seen with employment insurance. I wonder if you could comment on that.

Hon. John McCallum: I think that's more a question for you, Cynthia.

The only thing I would mention on employment insurance is that, as I said earlier, we're not touching it.

Ms. Jean Crowder: We'd like you to add more money, actually.

Hon. John McCallum: As I said in response to the earlier question, for my sins, in the division of labour that exists, my job is to take the money away from departments. It falls to someone else, in particular Ralph Goodale, to give the money back to departments—

Ms. Jean Crowder: I understand that.

Hon. John McCallum: —so you'll have to talk to him on that issue.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I will.

Hon. John McCallum: On the gender lens, I think Ms. Binnington is well qualified to do this. In the expenditure review committee we are not able—I believe we only have 12 people in the secretariat—to address all of the broad dimensions of the issues you raise. But I do think we're doing a good job, and she will explain hopefully in a bit more detail in terms of the things that come to us how we do in reality apply that gender analysis.

Mrs. Cynthia Binnington: Thank you for the opportunity to speak in a little bit more detail about the approach we took.

I think my level of comfort around the application of the gender lens is a little bit hard due to the nature of the proposals we've been receiving. A very significant number of the proposals have been around efficiencies—operating efficiencies, corporate efficiencies—and there have not been significant numbers that have focused in the program area.

Those that are in the program area have really been about the identification of programs where the need has changed and the program has delivered the service that was required. Within that cluster, knowing them fairly well—far better I think than actually I want to at times—there's not really much that comes close to touching on issues related to the service or impacting specifically on women.

We took a look at whether or not we needed to actually do something that was a quantification or was systematic, but the impact was so low that there did not appear to be a need, in the short timeframe we had, to do something that was more systematic in terms of the programs we had available. We did go back where there were bundled programs, where a department came in and gave us a general statement about what they were going to do, and we talked to them about what was contained within the bundle. It's our hope that we haven't missed anything, but we continue to work through clarification of that.

In a couple of areas where there have been concerns expressed, proposals can be modified, further justification has been given, but none of those touch on women, to my knowledge.

The Chair: Is there anything further?

Ms. Yelich, do you have anything further?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I'm interested in specifics. When you talk about the nature of some of the proposals, can you give me an example of some of the departments that have been touched, the kinds of proposals you've had to deal with and the dilemmas you deal with as well.

Hon. John McCallum: Do you mean in terms of gender issues?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: No, not gender. We're just talking about your job. You're looking at a department and you're deciding that you're going to make some cuts. Give me an example of some department most recently where in your mind you made some cuts that you feel good about. Give me an example of a department and of a cut.

• (1245)

Hon. John McCallum: Well, I can't do that in precise terms because no decision has been made. The work of the committee that I chair will go to the Prime Minister in the form of a recommendation, or possibly some options, and then in consultation with the finance minister the decisions will be reported in the budget.

So given that it's a budget issue, I cannot comment on specific areas that could be providing the savings. And this is true in the Liberal caucus—my colleagues will back me up. I can't get into specific programs or areas because of the budget rules.

But I can say that a good chunk of the total savings will come from these corporate efficiencies at the centre—that is, smarter procurement, smarter management of property, smarter delivery of services. I think perhaps half of all of our savings will come from those areas. I can also tell you that it looks like possibly three-quarters or more of the savings will come from improved efficiencies, whether corporate efficiencies or a greater efficiency in delivering a program without any effect on the services received by Canadians. The great bulk of the savings will come from those improved efficiencies.

I apologize, but I don't know yet, because no decision has been made and because of the fact that this is going through the budget. Even if I did know, I wouldn't be at liberty to give you specific budget information in advance of the budget.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Thank you. I was just willing to help if you needed any help.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kadis or Ms. Torsney?

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Clearly every organization should be working on continuous improvement and identifying areas that are no longer of value. I guess when I hear of improvements in administration I'm concerned, as I'm sure a number of the people working in the federal civil service are, that we—not we but certainly some governments—have cut the number of front-line people—the secretaries, the people who answer the telephones—and instead have switched to some system where the senior people end up doing a lot of the day-to-day administration stuff—it's probably the middle people, not the senior people—and it doesn't seem like that much of a cost saving in the end.

I would argue that some of the issues the Auditor General had raised in the HRDC problem involved the elimination of some of the people who could do the paperwork. Of course, it was never a problem that money was missing. It was that there were some paperwork inefficiencies that arose as a result of downsizing. Maybe in the course of making cuts we went too far in certain areas.

On an individual department basis, how do you make sure that improving efficiencies doesn't result in greater inefficiency? If most of the front-line staff are women who tend to be paid at a lower rate, although thankfully pay equity did extend to the federal government, unlike Newfoundland, how do we make sure we're not cutting within the civil service the very people who are the people this committee cares a lot about?

Hon. John McCallum: Let me comment on two fairly general points.

As you look at the growth of the civil service over recent years, there's been quite a lot of growth in numbers at the top. The EX level positions, which are the senior civil servants, have grown by about 50% over the last five years. So one of the areas I'm looking at is not the low end, or even the middle end, but the central administration in Ottawa of departments. We have approached departments on that dimension and are pushing in that area.

I think another issue related to what you said is what one might call the regional lens. I've heard a lot of representations, many from Liberal caucus members because I'm a Liberal, but I imagine the concerns would be shared by other parliamentarians, about the regional presence of federal services and employees, that when the jobs came back in the federal civil service after program review, they came back disproportionately in Ottawa.

So we are very concerned to make sure that the program we are embarked upon is fair across regions. We've actually reworked some of our proposals to ensure they conform appropriately to what you might call a regional lens, that they are not in any sense unfair to the regions. I think the perception, and in some cases the reality, in previous years is that the people in the National Capital Region were in some sense insulated and that where the pain was felt most intensely was in the regions. We're determined to make sure that is not the case.

Cynthia, do you have any other points?

• (1250)

Mrs. Cynthia Binnington: No. I can only reinforce that it's a challenge function. We were clearly directed to take a hard look at where changes were being proposed and to focus on growth and relativity, particularly at the senior level, when reviewing the proposals.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Let me suggest that if there's an opportunity for you to do some independent audits, the idea is that, in some cases, it might be valuable to have off-the-record chats with front-line people in some of the departments. Through program review, I know it was very frustrating for the individuals in my region particularly. As this process goes up the line, as it does in departments, it goes from the deputy minister to the minister, and then to you.

The front-line people will be able to tell you that it's not going to work and where the problems are. Perhaps you could have a focus group of individuals who work on the ground delivering some of these services that we provide as the federal government and have them talk to you honestly without affecting their careers.

The Chair: Thank you.

We only have a tiny bit of time left.

Madam Brunelle and Madam Bonsant, very briefly.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Mr. Minister, what's important here is equality between men and women, and pay equity is part of that. As a fund and revenue collector, you must have an opinion on this equity which could perhaps fill your coffers. We saw the Supreme Court decision concerning Newfoundland and Labrador last week. What's your position on pay equity?

L'hon. John McCallum: My position on?

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Pay equity.

Hon. John McCallum: I'm personally in favour of the things the government does. However, as I said, that's not part of my mandate. As I just told you, we are revenue collectors. I hope, as you suggested earlier, that I have an influence on spending, but I'm not the one who decides.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: You should support pay equity: you'd have more tax revenue from women and that would be good for your department.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Crowder, very briefly.

Ms. Jean Crowder: The last time I asked about good public policy I wanted a definition of what good public policy looked like.

Hon. John McCallum: Well, I think you mentioned the term, Cynthia, so you can have the honour of answering that question.

Mrs. Cynthia Binnington: I did. I meant it as a colloquialism, not a term of art. In terms of good public policy, I think we were really trying to ensure that what we did improved services to Canadians and, in the same way, did no harm.

The Chair: Let me thank you both very much for coming today. As I indicated at the beginning, we were waiting for you. We wanted to very clearly reinforce the message that we are concerned that the decisions you make do not negatively affect women in this country. Thank you both for coming.

To my colleagues, I want to let you know that we will very shortly be sending out a written report of the steering committee that met prior to this meeting, only because of the lack of time right now. It will be out, I hope, within the next few days.

I want to thank you all. We'll meet again in the new year.

Thank you very much.

• (1255)

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you.

Thank you for all your questions.

The Chair: This meeting is adjourned.

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