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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.)):
We'll begin. Welcome back to the committee as we begin a new year.

Let me begin by introducing to members of the committee a new... I was going to say "new old" clerk, but I'm not quite sure how to define it. I'd like to welcome Rick Rumas to the committee. Bonnie Charron has gone to look after some other responsibilities in her department and Rick is going to be helping us here. I'm happy to welcome him here.

Let me now welcome the Status of Women here. As everybody knows, one of the items we heard a great deal about during the hearings we had with many of the women's groups across the country was the issue of funding to women's advocacy groups. The Status of Women are here today to make a presentation on funding. I think you also had a number of other papers distributed to you ahead of time for discussion and thought.

Let me welcome you and ask who is beginning.

Florence.

Ms. Florence Ievers (Coordinator, Status of Women Canada):
Thank you very much, Madame Chair.

It is a pleasure to be back before you today, especially to talk about the critical issue of funding to women's organizations across the country. I know the committee has heard from many witnesses with their thoughts on the women's program funding, and I appreciate the opportunity today to provide you with a look at how our funding operates today and how it compares to how it has operated in the past.

Funding is just one of the components of what we believe is necessary to advance gender equality and equality for women in Canada. Combined with support for women's equality-seeking organizations, there must be strong federal machinery to coordinate progress on policy within government, as well as strong accountability measures, and the systematic implementation of gender-based analysis.

[Translation]

First of all, allow me to introduce my colleagues Jackie Claxton and Nanci-Jean Waugh. Ms. Claxton, whom you met when we first appeared before the committee, is the Director General of the Women's Program and Regional Operations, while Ms. Waugh is the Director of Communications and Consultations for Status of Women Canada.

[English]

Status of Women Canada provides support to national, regional, and local women's and other equality-seeking organizations to support priority issues for the advancement of women's equality. Support for women's organizations across the country comes in many forms, not just financial. Through a network of 15 points of service across the country, the staff of the women's program maintain regular contact with women's and other equality-seeking organizations across Canada. This is an important point to keep in mind as we look at the nature of women's program funding, the changes that have been made to the program over the years, the reason for the changes, and the impact of these changes on women's organizations.

When the women's program was created in 1973, its purpose was to provide funding to women's groups, develop resources for use by groups and their projects, and help them with self-evaluation. Since that time it has remained the primary mechanism of support for voluntary sector action on women's equality, providing that support thanks to the decentralized nature of delivery of the women's program. Funding for such things as direct service and public education is often available through other programs, but the women's program remains one of the few places providing funding for action research, input into public policy, and institutional change strategies.

While there are other programs through which women's organizations can seek funding, the women's program is unique in its wide scope, supporting strategies by all women—rural, urban, young, aboriginal, immigrant women—and a cross-section of issues—economic, legal, social, etc.—which act as barriers to women's full participation in Canadian society. The women's program has the flexibility to fund a wide variety of organizational configurations, including ad hoc committees and coalitions that come together to work on particular issues.

[Translation]

Initially, the Women's Program provided funding to groups engaged in projects designed to improve the status of women in some aspects of their lives. Grants were also given for the formation of new groups and to help with operating expenses of already established organizations.

Two categories of funding were available. Firstly, project funding was provided to support short-term activities such as conferences and information packages. Secondly, operational funding was provided to maintain infrastructure or critical facilities related to the purpose of the organization. Eligible for this type of funding, also referred to as core funding, were national, territorial and provincial women's organizations which promote action and coordination on a range of status of women issues targeting Canada's North, isolated areas and rural regions in Canada.

● (1540)

[English]

Since the creation of the women's program, the whole environment has changed. Globalization, the technological revolution, and increasing immigrant populations, among other things, have all had an impact on women's lives in the intervening years. The issues themselves have become more complex. For instance, when the women's program was established, issues like trafficking and the commercial exploitation of children were not even on the public radar.

As the environment changed, so did the groups. Over the years new groups were established and the work of existing groups has evolved to respond to new issues. Changes to the environment were further compounded by changes internal to government. Reductions to grants and contribution budgets introduced by the federal government resulted in changes to the women's program funding, changes such as a cap on access to operational funding by new groups and the elimination of funding for groups whose mandates were less closely tied to the priorities of the women's program.

The government's budget speech of 1995 announced a reduction in spending and a number of changes to programs to help pave the way to balancing the budget. Among programs affected were funding to the voluntary sector, discontinuing funding to some groups, and encouraging a system of matching funds. All ministers and their departments were asked to review their funding approach to increase accountability for grants and contributions. Compounding that reduction was a significant change in the federal government machinery for gender equality. The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women was closed and some of its functions transferred to Status of Women Canada, along with the women's program, most recently, which had been part of Human Resources Development Canada.

In 2000, Treasury Board Secretariat introduced performance reporting and committed the government to excellence in four areas: responsible spending, managing for results, values, and citizen focus. More specifically, the government had now increased expectations with respect to monitoring and evaluation. Traditionally, government management practices were more about process than results. The focus was on resources spent on activities and not outputs produced. It used to be sufficient for the women's program to report annually on the number of initiatives supported, but the new government-wide change in approach to funding meant that was no longer sufficient.

Ms. Jackie Claxton (Director General, Women's Programs and Regional Operations, Status of Women Canada): I'm going to go back to the point that was made about the request to ministers

to review their funding support to the voluntary sector in the 1995 budget. I want to talk a bit about the context in which we were living from a program perspective and about the process we undertook to seek input prior to making changes to the program.

In terms of the context at this time—we're talking about 1995 to 1998, somewhere in that vicinity—there were approximately 100 groups receiving program funding, which absorbed about 50% of the program's budget. Those 100 groups represented about one-third of the 300 initiatives being funded and one-third of the activities grants being provided on an annual basis.

Program funding at that time was defined as support to women's organizations to maintain their organizational infrastructure in order to carry out a clearly defined program of activities related to program objectives and funding areas.

As you can see, the definition referred to a program of activities. If I look at an umbrella organization, the groups would provide details on their ongoing activities as well as their organizational governance, functions such as annual general meetings, executive meetings, committee meetings, etc. Regular reporting was required, and monitoring obviously was done by the staff, but this reporting, because of the definition of the mechanism, was focused on activities as opposed to results.

There was a distinction between the kinds of costs that could be covered under program funding versus project funding, and a lot of that had to do with governance processes such as board meetings, annual meetings, and newsletters.

In terms of the process that was followed, these groups would come to us toward the end of the calendar year with their submissions for the upcoming fiscal year. The negotiations would unfold and decisions would be made in order to ensure as much as possible that support would be provided as close as possible to the beginning of the next fiscal year.

The budget reductions that Florence mentioned, which took place over a period of 10 years and took out about \$4 million from the program's budget, were essentially passed on to the program-funded groups. In other words, whatever level of funding they were getting, if the budget was cut by 10%, 20%, 5%, they were also cut by 5%, which created huge challenges. When you look at the level of support that the program has historically been able to provide to women's groups compared to some other programs, you will find that our levels are low, particularly if you look at the national level. I'd be happy to come back to that and talk about that later on.

We've provided you with a list of the groups that were receiving program funding. This list is from 1997-98, which was the last year that program funding was provided. I present it to you to give you a sense of the differences in the numbers of groups being supported and the types of groups across the country. Again, I'd be happy to come back to this if you have specific questions. You'll see that it ranges from umbrella groups, both at a national and regional level, to women's centres and other kinds of groups at a local level.

If there are specific questions, we could come back to that.

• (1545)

Florence has mentioned that because of the budget cuts we had to place a cap on access to program funding. Given that the program's budget was going down, we were not in a position to continue to make commitments to provide support that would basically engage the program's limited resources on an ongoing basis, so we had a number of new groups that were formed over this period of time who did not have access to our support.

The way the program handled that was to provide assistance in the form of projects, because it was the only other vehicle available to us, and we tried as much as possible to respond to what was necessary for those groups to carry out their activities. I think it's fair to say that you began to see a blurring of the lines between the kind of support that we were providing through project funding and the kind of support that was being provided through program funding.

[Translation]

I'd now like to talk about the consultations that we have carried out to seek input from or to sound out the views of groups as regards our funding mechanisms.

Florence mentioned that the Women's Program was integrated with Status of Women Canada in 1995. In 1996, the Department launched a Canada-wide consultation process. It goes without saying as part of this initiative, we sought input from groups receiving funding as well as from some of the department's other key partners.

We asked stakeholders questions about various aspects of the department. With respect specifically to the Women's Program, we asked groups to tell us which issues were priorities for them. We questioned them about core funding, the funding mechanism used at the time. We also identified other possible funding options, among others, multi-year funding in the hope of getting some feedback from these groups.

Obviously, none of the groups was opposed to project funding. They viewed this as the ideal funding mechanism to address priorities and help meet the needs of new and emerging groups. They also viewed operational funding as a critical program component in that it allowed groups to engage in long-term planning activities, something that ensured continuity and flexibility, a key requirement if groups are to meet new or unexpected challenges.

However, groups recognized that access to operational funding was inequitable, in part because of our budgetary situation and that moreover, even if access were more equitable, only a limited number of groups could in fact secure operational funding at any given time, because of our financial situation. Obviously, they suggested that program funding be maintained and recommended that the number

of groups eligible for this type of funding be increased in a fair and equitable manner.

Another suggestion that was made to us was that core funding be offered on an alternating basis to different women's groups, so that each would benefit for a few years' time. We could discuss this suggestion further, but implementing a strategy of this kind could lead to a number of problems.

Lastly, of all the comments made by groups in the course of these consultations, worth noting is the suggestion that program flexibility be maintained when it comes times to choose the groups and activities to be funded. The importance of maintaining program flexibility is one suggestion that we seemingly hear each time input is sought from women's associations.

• (1550)

[English]

Having examined the issues, talked to groups, heard what they had to say, and looked at the overall context, that brings me to the question of the changes that were made. These are the changes that you've been hearing a lot about from groups.

We announced changes in 1997. They were announced as allowing the program to address the issues related to equity of access, flexibility, and accountability.

The most pertinent change that was made, as far as questions the committee has been raising, was in the funding mechanism. We went from one mechanism to two. I guess at the end of the day the view was that by creating one budget with completely flexible access, it would maximize our ability to respond to the needs of the groups. Rather than having two separate categories and having this differential treatment between the two separate categories, the focus should be on the issues, the work to be carried out.

We defined initiatives as funding for change-oriented strategies that would occur within a specified period of time, with a clearly articulated plan to achieve results. You see the reference to results in the context of the definition as compared to our form of definition, for example, program funding, which referred more particularly to a program of activities. So we had support for strategies linked to results.

In terms of the question of infrastructure and overhead, we basically said that all costs that we had previously been able to fund would continue to be eligible. When a group came to us with a strategy or a set of strategies, we would look at what was necessary, whether that was rent, salaries, etc., but the costs had to be tied to the activities and the specific strategies being taken out.

In terms of the approach to results, we now ask—we have started asking since that time—that groups submit with their strategies a clear indication of the results they're trying to achieve, as well as their indicators, along with an evaluation plan.

The other thing we did was to provide multi-year funding. Again, this was to address the question of the reality of the work necessary to respond to certain kinds of objectives of the program as well as objectives of the group. In our particular case, we decided to link availability of multi-year funding to two of the program objectives related to institutional change and public policy work because these are things that obviously don't take place within a 12-month time period. We provided multi-year funding with more or less the same criteria as the regular funding, except that we did indicate that we were looking to see to what extent groups had experience and capacity in doing long-term planning and managing long-term activities.

Whereas previously the maximum amount of funding available was up to 12 months, we allowed groups to apply to us up to 18 months. You can come for funding up to a maximum of 18 months, from 18 months to 36 months, or for a maximum of three years.

If we look at the situation as it stands at this point in time, I think it's fair to say that we have a complex program, and the picture out there is very complicated. We see a variety of results. I'm going to try to go quickly through the major areas because I know the committee will be coming back to us with questions.

• (1555)

In terms of equity, which was one of our principal reasons for making the changes, the biggest difference is that we no longer have these two classes of funding, and therefore there's more of a level playing field. When people come with initiatives, the submissions are assessed on the basis of a whole set of factors, and they're judged on an individual basis.

We do see that we are supporting newer groups, while at the same time continuing to support many of the organizations that in the past received program funding. I can provide examples of those newer groups if the committee is interested.

In terms of flexibility, we see a number of different things. With regard to the level of funding, for example, in the case of program funding groups, before we were somewhat tied to historic funding levels and the reductions that were coming as a result of the budget. We now have the ability to assess the level of funding within the context of the resources we have available as well as what is needed for the particular strategy.

Multi-year funding has obviously increased the capacity of groups to plan over the long term. Since its introduction, we have provided 48 multi-year funding initiatives to roughly 40 groups.

On the other hand, there are a number of questions related to flexibility that we hear from groups and that we observe ourselves. Because the groups now have to provide more specific information on their strategies and results, concerns are being expressed about their ability to respond to opportunities and issues that arise in the course of the various activities and strategies being carried out. We also know that while our multi-year funding mechanism has been welcomed, there are questions about the fact that it's restricted to specific objectives. We are aware that in other funding programs, multi-year funding is being provided up to as much as five years and, in a more general sense, for general capacity building.

So we have the challenge of ensuring that the groups are able to report to us on results, while at the same time allowing them the flexibility to be responsive. At this point in time, we use a couple of strategies. First of all, if something major comes up in the middle of an existing initiative and the group does not have resources to address it, they can come to us for what we call a supplement. They don't have to submit a whole new application. They indicate the nature of this new issue. We will assess it in collaboration with them and make a recommendation. The other thing that can happen is that resources can be reallocated within the context of the moneys that are already being provided. There again it's a matter of communicating with the program staff and coming to an understanding and agreement about what the group is doing and what change is happening.

With regard to achieving and reporting results, this is a challenging area. Certainly it's something we hear about from groups. When we were here last time, our committee members from Quebec raised questions around how you measure results given the nature of the kinds of work we're supporting. If you're trying to change attitudes and to have an impact on public policy, you're doing work that's very complex. It's not linear. There are many different factors. So I think on the part of both staff and the groups we continue to be involved in a learning process about how best to work toward being able to better document and articulate the results of the work we're all doing.

We're not the only people facing this challenge. We are working inside with other programs and departments that are funding equality-seeking groups as well as social change work to share information on strategies to address the increased reporting that is required.

• (1600)

Groups certainly talk to us about the levels of paperwork. We are not in the business of asking for paperwork for the sake of paperwork; we try to be flexible and vary the requirements based on the nature of the group and the size of the initiative being supported, and our staff are there to work along with the groups to provide assistance if that is appropriate and feasible.

Because of the emphasis on results, to the extent that groups are able to identify the results they're working to up front, we see more focused strategies in some instances. There are more focused strategies, to the extent that we're able to provide more money where that is viable. Obviously, high levels of funding make a difference. If you look at the overall numbers for the program, you will see that the number of initiatives being supported is lower than in the past. That is because we have multi-year funding and we are giving more money to fewer groups, among other things.

These areas are of primordial significance to the groups and to ourselves—stability and capacity, sustainability and security. What we hear from the groups is that the necessity for resources to be tied to the specific strategies, to results, and to the budgets that are submitted is having an impact on their ability to retain staff. If there are gaps between the ending of one initiative and the beginning of another initiative, that obviously creates difficulties for groups, particularly in situations where they depend on us to a great extent for their resources. If there's a time gap that groups spend developing proposals, it's not necessarily covered. There's nobody necessarily paying for the staff time spent developing proposals, and that creates challenges for some groups.

Going back to the question of flexibility, the linking between the resources and the results is affecting the continuity and the capacity of the groups on an ongoing basis. At the same time, when you look at what we have provided in the past, certainly program funding was not guaranteed to groups; they had to submit to us on an annual basis. If you look at our list of funding, we can point to groups that have been receiving funding from the program for 20-plus years.

The last point I want to make here is related to the program's resources. On the next page you'll see the slide that indicates the resources we have at this present point in time. This is with the increased resources that were received as a result of age. It's just a flag that even with a 20% increase in the budget you're still looking at small amounts of money in relation to the demand that's out there.

I'm just going to wrap up with some of the questions that arise from what we've seen over the last number of years in terms of the changes that have been made and the impacts of the changes. I think the key one is the question of how you create a funding mechanism or mechanisms. What are the funding mechanisms that best respond to the nature of the program in terms of its objectives, the levels of the resources, and the needs and realities of women's groups, while at the same time meeting government requirements?

• (1605)

We have an existing mechanism. Can it be changed in terms of either implementation or design? We know the stability is important. What are the ways in which we can respond to issues around stability, keeping in mind the kinds of things that the voluntary sector initiative has identified in its code of good practice on funding, while at the same time addressing the results-based approach?

Do we need different streams or types of funding? What are the kinds of factors that one would look at in making decisions around where the funding should go? Do you make decisions based on types of strategies? Do you look at different types of groups? We've mentioned that we're not the only people in the business of providing funding to organizations, and I think it would be important to look at other models of support that are out there in other departments.

Last but not least, because women's equality issues are cross-cutting, I think there's a very important question around what kinds of support women's organizations are accessing from other federal departments. We are in the process of undertaking a program evaluation, which we expect will help us to answer some of these questions. It is an external evaluation. It is designed, in addition, to respond to Treasury Board requirements. More than 500 groups that

have received support from the program over the last three and a half years will be surveyed. There will be case studies; there will be key informant interviews.

We're looking for information and concrete systematic information from groups and other key informants on the impact of the changes in the program mechanisms as well as the results of the work, as well as their views on other kinds of models that we could be implementing in terms of the program. We expect the initial results in April and the final results we're hoping will be available to us in August.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to open the floor. Did you want to add something else?

Ms. Florence Ievers: If you'll allow me, Madame Chair, I just want to say that the program was created 30 years ago on the recommendation of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, and if you asked us if the program is as relevant today as it was 30 years ago, we would definitely say yes.

There are a number of questions, as Jackie said, that need to be answered, and we're really hoping that the evaluation of the program will give us ideas as to how best to keep this very vibrant activity across the country, an activity that is so essential to having Status of Women realize its mandate.

The Chair: Thank you. I think we all hope that.

Ms. Grewal.

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

I would like to thank the witnesses for their presentations. Thank you so much for coming. I have a couple of questions.

My first question is this. Some of the witnesses appearing before the standing committee commented that Status of Women refers organizations to other government departments' funding programs and that these other departments often do not recognize the relevance of the gender approach to their mandates. Could you please describe steps your department has taken with officials in other funding organizations to highlight the importance of gender consideration in research and advocacy work?

Also, when and why did Status of Women Canada discontinue program or core funding to equality-seeking organizations?

My third question is, are there Treasury Board Secretariat guidelines that prohibit departments from providing core funding? If so, please provide references to specific policies.

Ms. Florence Ievers: Let me answer the second part of your question first.

In 1995, when the government was looking at cutting and looking at what it was funding, ministers were encouraged to look in their departments to see which programs were still relevant and to look at funding mechanisms to see if they were still relevant. So in 1995 this was looked at by our department.

As Jackie Claxton mentioned, we did conduct a consultation across the country to see what women's groups thought about the program, its future, and the funding mechanisms. At the end of the day, for a number of reasons, although groups at the time certainly were insistent that core funding—as you call it, program funding—be maintained, because there were new groups, new issues, and very little money, and because we wanted a more equitable program, instead of having two streams of funding, the decision was made to go to one stream of funding that would nevertheless allow for some overhead costs to be included in the funding mechanism.

The Treasury Board came up with a results-based approach in 2000, and since then, to be renewed, most programs in the government need to have a results-based management accountability framework. That is not something that is applicable just to our program; it is across the board in government. Therefore, we are looking at a more results-based approach for our groups.

There is no set rule about core funding. Some departments, I imagine, look at the sustainability of groups, and when we decided to go from two streams to one stream, those were the very difficult questions we had to look at.

I'm heartened in a way. I think Jackie was very candid in explaining how difficult it is at times for us managing a program as well as for the community we are trying to serve to adjust to new ways of doing things. We are hopeful that the evaluation we have begun to conduct will help us come to a clearer picture of the situation. We hear from groups regularly about the difficulties they are in, but the decisions that were made in 1995 were, I believe, made in order to ensure more equity and ensure that new groups and new issues could be addressed.

To the first part of your question, which was on how we deal with directing groups to go to other departments and how they are responding, I'd like to ask Jackie to respond on the experience she's had.

• (1615)

Ms. Jackie Claxton: I think one of the points Florence made at the beginning was that the program looks at the issues in a horizontal way, but because women's equality is cross-cutting, obviously there is a wide set of challenges that relate to the mandates of other departments. But there are very few other places within the government that have programs that focus specifically on women. So when groups go, they will be dealing with a funding body or a program that is looking at issues in a general way, and then it becomes a question of demonstrating how the women's perspective or the women's experience is relevant to the mandate of the department.

That is something our staff work on. We try to remain informed of resources available in other places. We attempt to spend time helping to open the doors and work from the inside to demonstrate to colleagues in other departments and programs the relevance and the link between the kinds of issues and concerns women's groups are raising with their programs and departmental mandates.

So it's a continuing process, and I think it's part of the larger question that has been raised about gender-based analysis of policies and programs.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Brunelle.

[Translation]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Good afternoon to our witnesses.

Ms. Claxton, you stated that your funding program is complex. I'm glad to hear you say that, because I was beginning to have doubts about my grasp of the issue.

It's understandable that the program is so complex. When we think about how these funding programs have evolved, we see that you have had to contend with budget cutbacks. Furthermore, your management framework is results-based. The fact remains, nevertheless, that it is fundamentally difficult for groups to work with women who are grappling with ever-changing social problems.

I naively conclude from all of this that you truly need program evaluation. It's a good thing that you were able to get some results in April.

For some years now, women's groups have been talking to us about core funding problems. However, they may be facing other types of problems. Given your vast experience, what, in your opinion, is the main problem that women's groups face? Is the real problem the lack of core funding, or simply the lack of overall funding? What do you think?

• (1620)

Ms. Florence Ievers: Obviously, she'll defer to me on that question.

Our program is designed to be broad in scope and targets 51 per cent of the population. As you know, we focus on issues such as violence, women's economic circumstances, women's rights and human rights, which of course encompass women's rights.

Initially, the program received a modest amount of funding, as you will note on reading the documents that were distributed to you. Up to \$12 million in funding was originally allocated, but this amount was cut back to \$8 million during the 1990s. By a happy coincidence, when we received funding for our Agenda for Gender Equality in 2000, half of the money was distributed directly to various groups. We felt it was important to shore up this sector not only because of its valuable contribution to keeping up in the loop, but also because it helped keep us apprised of new developments and issues.

Jackie could also discuss with you further the changes instituted by the federal government. Indeed, the federal government ordered budget cutbacks and brought in new requirements. Specifically it asked us to decide if, in our estimation, core funding remained the best way of funding groups. Furthermore, changes at the provincial and territorial government level also had an impact on women's groups in general. Fewer resources were made available, yet the demands remained the same.

As I mentioned at the outset, new issues have come to the fore, namely the sexual exploitation of children and the trafficking of women. Our society continues to grapple with such problems as violence against women and spousal abuse.

Consequently, the fewer resources we have, the less able we are to identify issues correctly, to heighten public awareness and to attempt to find solutions to these problems.

No one will tell you that a shortage of resources is a good thing. However, is operational funding the best solution? I haven't yet decided and I can't say that Status of Women Canada had decided either.

Eight years ago, we initiated a series of changes. These changes took shape and came into effect in 1998. We have been analyzing the results since 2000-2001. We ask groups to evaluate the changes, to provide us with indicators and to target their actions so that outcomes are clearly known. As I said, the time has come to evaluate the situation so that solutions become clear to us.

I'm not saying that turning the clock back to the way things were 10 or 15 years ago and that having two types of funding is necessarily the be-all and the end all. There may be three or four other approaches that we could take. Some are looking at strategic actions or at shoring up our internal capacity.

There are other more interesting, more modern ways of looking at this situation. We could resort to different types of funding. We need to weigh different options. I sincerely hope that our client groups will take the time to participate in this evaluation. We've already been in touch with 500 groups, with associations that have already received funding and even with others that no longer receive any financial support, to find out why they're no longer seeking any funding and to find out where the real problem lies.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): I also want to echo my thanks to you for coming and presenting today. I know it's often difficult to come and really talk about the fact that many of us feel the department is underresourced.

I was pleased to hear you make the comments around women falling behind. I think that's a consistent message that we heard from the women's groups. What we find often is that women's groups that have the least amount of resources to access funding are the ones that most need the funding. So when you talked about wondering why women's organizations sometimes don't even apply for funding, I think we heard fairly clearly from a number of organizations that they just don't have the capacity to do so. A significant amount of time goes into funding applications, as you well know, and when organizations don't have core funding, they have to contract or look for volunteers to write funding applications, which is very difficult for them.

I just want to touch specifically on funding a bit more before I ask my question. I got the "Canada's Performance 2004" report, which talks about how Canada is performing in a variety of federal programs and policies, and interestingly enough, there was no gender-based analysis in that report. I think that's significant in terms of the amount of funding your department receives. As you pointed out, 51% of the population are women, and yet the department really has a minuscule amount of funding to deal with the variety and complexity of problems that are available. So in the context of no

gender-based analysis on social and economic policy, it's very clear that women are not on the national agenda. This is not a recent thing; this has been going on for decades. So I think part of our obligation is to increase the level of awareness. I know the department is working around education and awareness, but I think that's a big challenge in terms of getting adequate funding to do that. When organizations are cut, because they're already at the margin of the amount of funding, a 5% cut can mean the difference between survival and the death of an organization.

I'll just comment quickly on results-based analysis. We really need to remind people that we're not talking about widgets. Every one of us would want funding to be accountable and responsibly spent, but often the results, as Ms. Claxton pointed out, are not linear. It's very challenging for organizations to start measuring some of the intangible results that they often see from this kind of funding.

I wonder if you'd comment specifically on this. One of the things we heard from groups that may help around the lack of coordination and lack of profile for women's programs across the federal government generally is the move toward perhaps having a separate department set up as a stand-alone, with a stand-alone minister. I know that would require more significant funding, but I wonder if it's a way to raise the profile of the programs across the government.

I also wonder if you could comment more specifically on the evaluation. I understand the evaluation is done in a broad-based consultative way, but I wonder if the organizations are also going to be included in developing the solutions, rather than having the department just gather information and then do the solutions internally. I also think we heard very clearly from women that they often know what the solutions to the problems are; they're just not asked to be part of the solution process.

• (1625)

Ms. Florence Ievers: You asked a question about a stand-alone department. You said groups had mentioned that. I'll only go back to the answer I gave when we first appeared before the committee. Those are questions that we can do nothing about. Status of Women Canada has been in a number of arrangements before, and we would welcome any recommendations or views the committee would have in this regard.

Jackie could perhaps answer the question that is more related to the evaluation.

Ms. Jackie Claxton: You raise an important point.

I mentioned a survey to solicit input, key informant interviews, case studies, and file reviews. What I would anticipate is that as we start to get the data coming in, there would be a series of small focus groups, which would allow us, as you say, to bring a cross-section of not only groups we fund right now but other groups that have an interest and knowledge about these areas. We have in the past involved groups as we've made our way through various changes. For example, as we tried to come to grips with approaches to implementing a results-based regime, we created a little mechanism—we called it an NGO reference group—in which we brought together women who had experience at different levels from different parts of the country around this kind of issue to give us advice and to look at the kinds of forums we were developing. That's certainly something we've done in the past.

The only other thing I would comment on is with respect to questions of challenges relating to capacity to apply. In other words, people don't just fill out a piece of paper and submit it to us. Some of the challenge of dealing with the terms and the conditions and the bureaucratic process can be attenuated by the assistance of the staff. I am pleased, when I look at the list of those we're funding, to see aboriginal women, women who have been involved in the sex trade, low-income women. When you consider the variety of groups being supported, you see they are not groups that have full-time staff available to write applications. We have some experience in working to try to diminish the barriers. In fact we have a very strong track record there, I'd like to think, if you look at our list.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you.

I apologize; I went out of order.

Mr. Powers, it's your turn.

Mr. Russ Powers (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, Lib.): Thank you very much for your presentation. It was very detailed. I just have a few questions related to getting some clarity.

Before I ask the question, we have basically two charts that have been provided to us. One of them is your program funding groups in 1997-98, which I'll allude to, and the other one is historical. Do you have both of those?

I have a number of questions that will probably carry over into the next session. As the one I will refer to initially, let us consider the budget historical overview document. I'm going to ask for some clarity with regard to some comparables, to make sure we're comparing apples with apples and not apples with oranges. Let's take 1987-88 as one of the high years from the standpoint of total funded projects, with 702. Then let's use another that's comparable, say 2003-04. Are they apples-to-apples comparisons when we're talking about the total of funded projects? Ms. Claxton was referring to this point earlier. We have two different connotations: we have pre- and post-1995.

Ms. Jackie Claxton: The numbers are the numbers of projects or program fundings—or, as we call it now, initiatives—that were supported.

Mr. Russ Powers: Are they generally comparable?

Ms. Jackie Claxton: Yes, I would say so.

Mr. Russ Powers: There is no problem. I just needed clarity, to make sure before I start my next set of questions that we have that.

Using the 1987-88 numbers, on average you were funding to around \$17,000, plus or minus a few coins—in that ballpark—and in 2003-04 you were funding to about \$54,200, give or take a little. Can you help me with some differences? Is it just the period? In other words, is it inflation and all those components over a period of time?

Ms. Jackie Claxton: No. I should start by saying that throughout the history of the program we've provided support at local, regional, and national levels. For example, if you were to look at amounts of money being provided at the national level, you might see amounts ranging anywhere from \$200,000 to \$400,000. At the local level it would be more like \$20,000 to \$30,000. It would depend. It relates

to the variety of types of groups. For a small women's centre coming for a specific initiative it might be \$20,000, and for a provincial umbrella group between \$80,000 and \$120,000. You can't just divide the number of initiatives by the budget and then come up with an average, unfortunately.

• (1635)

Mr. Russ Powers: That was my assumption, but I needed you to clarify that from that standpoint.

Can we just look now at 1997-98—one of the charts we were provided?

Ms. Jackie Claxton: Yes.

Mr. Russ Powers: It refers to 106 organizations. And what we have for 1997-98 is about 340.... So 106 organizations did 345 projects.

Ms. Jackie Claxton: There are approximately 100 groups who received program funding, which represent about a third of the number of grants provided that year. So a third of the grants going out the door went to about 100 groups and represented about 50% of the budget.

Mr. Russ Powers: In other words, the 239 were for project initiatives.

Ms. Jackie Claxton: Yes.

Ms. Florence Ievers: These are the groups that received core funding.

Mr. Russ Powers: Correct, core funding. Thank you. I needed some clarity. I heard "core funding", I heard "program funding", I heard "projects", and all these things, and I just needed some clarity myself.

Ms. Jackie Claxton: We've never used the term "core funding". It used to be "operational funding" and then it was changed to "program funding". But it's the same. It's what groups would call core funding, funding to support infrastructure.

Mr. Russ Powers: Do I have a couple more minutes?

The Chair: We can extend this a little bit.

Mr. Russ Powers: Can we just talk, then, about whether the organizations or the projects—I'm just taking the next spinoff into whether they're provincial or territorial or local—can apply for funding from other sources? In other words, can they do matching funding? Are there any restrictions on our funding envelopes at all—maybe some caps, such as no more than 40%?

Ms. Jackie Claxton: There are no caps built into the program, so we don't say we will fund up to a maximum of x , y , z . I think in the official terms and conditions there might be a maximum, such as that the biggest grant that can be signed off would be x million dollars. But on a day-to-day operational basis there are no caps. Those levels are determined based on the level of resources, the demand in the region, and what is available from elsewhere.

We do not provide funding for 100%. That's clearly laid out. But recognizing that women's groups face great challenges accessing resources and raising money, because they often don't have charitable status numbers—because many of them are advocacy groups—we do ask the groups to identify their "in kind" contributions.

The Chair: That's enough for this round. Thank you.

Ms. Yelich.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Thank you for appearing this afternoon. I certainly think you do a very good job. It's not easy, as we see, with the mandate you have. I think that's where my first question is.

You talked historically about the funding and the changes of funding and even the changes of the programs. But are there change in the mandate that should happen? I believe it began as an equality-seeking mandate, but is that the mandate we always strive for, or should we now be striving for a different sort of mandate to work with than the one with which it began?

Ms. Jackie Claxton: In the context of the evaluation, there are a number of questions about the continuing relevance. Are there other programs that have similar mandates, is there a duplication, is it still congruent with federal government roles and priorities to have a mechanism like this, or is there something else that should be happening? I think that will provide us with an opportunity to look at that.

• (1640)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I am also very interested in the voluntary sector that is mentioned in the briefs—the code of good practice on funding. I wanted to know how you would implement the strategic approach as it is proposed in the accord between the voluntary sector and the Government of Canada.

Ms. Jackie Claxton: The strategic investment approach is one of the mechanisms suggested within the context of strengthened sustainable capacity. When we invest in strategies with groups.... One of the objectives of the program relates to building the capacity of groups in order to allow them to be more effective, so it tends to be done in an integrated way. If a group is carrying out a strategy and they need to build their capacity related to X, Y, Z skill, then resources would be provided within the body of that initiative for them to do that.

And then, of course, we have some women's organizations whose mandate is to look at areas, whether it's strategies related to research.... You have groups like Womenspace that look at questions related to how women can make use of the Internet as a tool to advance their input to public policy processes, and we support groups like that to carry out their work, which will then in turn benefit other organizations.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: You did mention that it's not all about women's issues. Many of them cross over to other...I suppose you were indicating gender or.... I just wondered when you said that. You said not all of your programs address only women's issues. Would you like to elaborate a little bit on that comment you made?

Ms. Jackie Claxton: I'm trying to think of a good example. If we were to look at child care, for example, we provide funding to groups to address the question of child care from a women's economic equality perspective. In other words, we address the lack of access to child care acting as a barrier to women's full participation in the labour force. Other departments and programs might be looking at child care more from the perspective of the nature of work in the sector and of what can be done in terms of enhancing skills and capacity.

We have provided funding to a number of women's groups at a national and a regional level to look at homelessness from a gender perspective, but there is also a homelessness strategy, so that would be another example of where we're looking at things from a gender perspective. Within the broader homelessness strategy you would need to look at to what extent it is looking at the impact on all Canadians, men and women.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I'm particularly interested in the violence against women aspect, because I heard recently that Australia did a report on domestic violence in which they cited the cost of domestic violence. I wonder, would that be something? Would that be a...?

Ms. Jackie Claxton: Violence is a good example because we have a long track record inside the federal government. The family violence initiative, for example, involves seven departments in addition to Status of Women Canada. It's led by Health Canada, and there are a number of other departments involved. I don't remember the others off the top of my head, but Health Canada has a role to play; the RCMP has a role to play. There are many different...a crime prevention program is looking at the root causes.

• (1645)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: So out of those seven areas, the funding comes from those departments or—

Ms. Jackie Claxton: Those departments have resources through the family violence initiative to provide support to a variety of strategies related to family violence.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Good. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Powers, you had another question you wanted to ask.

Mr. Russ Powers: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Just carrying on from my questions with regard to organizations and projects, after the impact, if you want to call it that, of 1993, 1997, and 1998, and I won't refer to the charts...could you comment on the number of organizations, the number of projects, and the range of them say post-1998? Have they changed? In your comments you talked about new initiatives and new things we're talking about. Have things changed? Has your focus changed?

Ms. Jackie Claxton: I think it varies across the country. I think as you can see from the numbers of initiatives, we're funding in different ways. For example, we're providing multi-year funding. We're attempting to fund at higher levels where it's feasible, so we're juggling between continuing to support existing groups, providing them with more adequate levels of money to carry out their work, while at the same time responding to new and emerging groups, and luckily we got the increase in the budget to assist us in that regard.

In some areas decisions have been taken to try to invest in a more global way within the region. For example, if we look at the Atlantic, you'll see a number of instances where funding might be provided to a group in Nova Scotia, but within the body of that strategy, resources are included for women to participate from the other Atlantic provinces so that the discussion is not restricted just to that province and the strategies can be developed in a more global way. That's just to give you one example.

Mr. Russ Powers: I think that's a great one, because one of my questions was to talk about logical partnerships, not only between the municipalities, the provinces, the territories, and ourselves...in other words, the ability to stretch the dollars and maximize the thing.

I don't want to create more work, but using the most recent year, 2003-04, of these 205 projects that are funded, and I don't need a verbal response now, but some time could you just tell us what areas they are in? We don't need names of the organizations, unless you so choose, but what areas are they involved in?

Ms. Jackie Claxton: The types of issues?

Mr. Russ Powers: Yes.

Ms. Jackie Claxton: Yes, we could provide that. You also received the list of all the initiatives supported in 2002-03 and 2003-04. But we could certainly give you a breakdown. That was sent before Christmas I think after our first appearance. So you have a complete list but we could give you an overview.

Mr. Russ Powers: Okay. Thank you. If it's already taken care of, great. We don't need anything more.

You're into the review situation. As you said, around about April you'll be into the preliminaries.

Ms. Jackie Claxton: The consultants are hoping to have the survey into the field before the end of this month, and they'll be getting the file review process already. So we hope to see preliminary data coming out in April.

Mr. Russ Powers: Madam Chair, with your permission, when the survey is ready for distribution, I think all of us would probably like to see the survey, the questions that are being asked about the internal organizations, and for the external organizations too, because obviously they'll be back to us when everything has been analyzed. But certainly the survey would be very helpful to us.

The Chair: I don't see a problem with that.

Mr. Russ Powers: I think that's probably it for me at the moment.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Bonsant.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Good afternoon.

How is it that given a budget of this magnitude, fewer and fewer projects are being funded?

Ms. Jackie Claxton: As I indicated, two factors come into play. First, there's the fact that the number of projects has decreased. However, some of these projects are multi-year initiatives. Instead of providing funding annually to a given group for a period of three or four years, we negotiate a multi-year arrangement with them. For instance, funding could be provided in installments every two years. These transactions would not be posted each year, but rather during the course of the fiscal year in which these initiatives were approved.

There is also the matter of the increased funding awarded to groups. This results in fewer initiatives that we support financially. However, in some instances, more funding is warranted. Instead of providing \$30,000, perhaps \$50,000 or \$80,000 could be allocated.

This would give groups an opportunity to devise a sound evaluation strategy and to have a greater impact in the field. That is the challenge that we face.

Ms. France Bonsant: I thought that some groups had disappeared.

Ms. Jackie Claxton: Some groups no longer exist, for a variety of reasons. Others no longer apply to the Women's Program for funding.

If you look at the list of groups in the Quebec region that received funding in 1997-1998, you'll note that more than thirty women's centres received either \$4,000, \$5,000 or \$7,000 per year in core funding. Most of these groups come to us if they have special initiatives in mind. We continue to provide financial assistance to the provincial association that represent these centres and the latter also receive funding from the provincial government. That's something you don't see. Therefore, the names of thirty or so groups in Quebec may no longer appear on our list.

Ms. France Bonsant: Thank you.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: On the issue of project funding, do you commit to providing funding to a group for a period of one or more years? One of the problems here is that some women's groups are established to address the specific needs of women. However, once they've addressed the issue, these groups need to know if their funding will continue. Does the fact that you cannot make a long-term commitment pose a problem for you?

Ms. Jackie Claxton: Once we've made a commitment, it's interesting to see just how involved we are. As I said, I can supply the names of several groups that we have supported financially over the past twenty years. Generally speaking, we do not have criteria that indicate from the outset...

For example, some funding programs or financial backers guarantee financing for five years. After then, they expect groups to find another source of ongoing funding. That's not how we work.

However, to answer the question as to whether we are able to commit to providing funding over the longer term, I would have to say that it all depends on the situation. As I stated earlier, the work doesn't end, as we all know, at a given point in time. As everyone well knows, certain issues emerge when groups receive funding.

For example, we've been addressing the issue of violence for years and we must and will continue to do so. Can we continue to provide funding to every single group involved in this effort? It really comes down to a question of strategy.

• (1655)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Crowder, and then I have a couple of questions.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you.

In some of the documentation our researcher prepared for us, she points out that various groups—the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy and the voluntary sector initiative—talk about some of the issues we've already talked about, such as how the emphasis on project funding appears to have a number of unfavourable consequences, including “restricted autonomy and independence, excessive time invested...(and) difficulty with staff recruitment”, some of these things that you've alluded to.

They also talk about the outright silencing of voices, that “the rich diversity of voices and views of non-profitand voluntary organizations” are just not heard because.... Part of it is around advocacy. It has become so sensitive that many organizations won't engage.

Another report talks about the fact that non-profit and voluntary groups have been subject to the vagaries of privategiving and are often not able to advance agendas that don't happen to be particularly popular.

I'm a little nervous, in that my understanding from the research is that initially, when the department was looking at core versus program funding, the women's community clearly said that they did not want to go to program funding, they wanted to stay with core, yet it was implemented anyway; that there was no mandate from outside the department, so there was no order to implement project-based versus core; that we'd been hearing clearly from groups that they're not happy with the project-based versus core; and that a number of other organizations outside of women's communities are also saying the same thing.

I'm coming back to my question. What's different? How are the women's communities going to feel confident that they are truly going to be heard in an evaluation process, when they really have been disregarded over the last number of years in terms of what works for them in terms of operating?

Ms. Florence Ievers: Clearly, in 1996, when we held the consultations before we made the changes to the program, we did hear, on the one hand, that groups would have preferred to continue with program funding. However, we also heard that groups wanted more equity.

If you look at the list we circulated of the groups that were funded before we made the changes, there were 106 groups that received that kind of funding. There were a number of groups that were emerging and that existed that were limited to just the project funding. Therefore, there was inequality in the program itself.

Ms. Jean Crowder: If I could just interject for a minute, my understanding was that they didn't want the equity at the expense of doing away with core funding, so I wonder if the groups were consulted in terms of a more equitable allocation of funding, because I do understand that point.

Ms. Jackie Claxton: What I would say is that people underscored the need for short-term funding. They underscored the need for funding to support infrastructure. They were very favourable to multi-year funding.

We provided multi-year funding. At the end of the day, I think what we would say is that unlike strict program funding, which places caps on overhead costs, etc., we have no caps and

infrastructure costs. If they could be attached to the strategy, in our view we would have a blended instrument. The question we're exploring through the evaluation is the specifics of the impact, trying to sort out our impact versus the impacts of many other things going on across the country, such as changes in funding at other levels.

On your point that groups provided us with input and that we didn't listen to that input, I think we would indicate that we responded in a way that respected the internal constraints we were under while at the same time trying to respond to what the groups needed.

• (1700)

Ms. Jean Crowder: I have just a quick comment. This is not meant to be a criticism aimed at the department. I think you are in a very challenging position in terms of the amount of funding you have available for such a huge.... I mean, \$250,000 a year for family violence just doesn't cut it.

I come from a community where family violence is an enormous problem. I do understand that piece of it, and I think we're in a very challenging fiscal environment.

Ms. Florence Ievers: Fortunately, we're able to complement what you call a small amount of \$250,000 per year on family violence with other initiatives that are funded by the program. Compounded with the difficulty of reconciling the different opinions that were expressed in the 1996 consultations, there were financial constraints, as you mentioned. The program was at \$8 million at that time. It's now at \$10.8 million, so we're on the rise again. That's a positive.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I think Justice Abella talked about the fact that when she did the employment equity report, she put it in context, saying she got \$1 million for one year, and the seal hunt—I think that's what it was—got \$3 million or \$2 million for three years. I think that says something about how we view women in the societal context.

The Chair: That's why we're here. It's to try to advance the agenda.

I have some questions. I don't usually intervene, but I'd like to today.

What I'm hearing today is that it's a very complex, very fluid, very challenging assignment process. I'm interested in knowing how you developed the criteria. I'm following up on some of the comments made earlier on the criteria, the strategic direction. Do you do it internally? Do you do any consultations with outside groups? Do you consult with political people? How is that developed for the disbursement of money?

I'm just going to ask you a few questions, because I'm watching the time for myself too.

Have you made a request for additional dollars this year? I'd be interested in knowing. I know you have the evaluation under way and that you don't want to prejudice it, but I'm wondering if you have any recommendations, even today, as to how what you're doing can be improved.

Ms. Florence Ievers: I'll answer the question about additional funding first.

As we mentioned to you earlier, we are coming to the end of the agenda for gender equality, and there is a need to look to the future for the next five years. As we look at Beijing plus 10 and the end of the agenda for gender equality, we will be looking at whether additional resources are required.

The Chair: What about at the present time, though? We're going into another fiscal year. Are you looking at it for the next fiscal year? Are you hopeful? Optimistic?

Ms. Florence Ievers: We're always crossing our fingers.

The Chair: And in terms of criteria and developing strategic direction, what recommendations would you bring forward?

Ms. Jackie Claxton: Here, Madam Chair, you're talking about the criteria for the program and the strategic direction—

The Chair: Criteria for how you give out money. I'm hearing some overarching criteria, but I'm also hearing—and maybe I'm wrong—a lot of subjectivity as well. That's not bad, but I'm hearing it.

Ms. Jackie Claxton: We have the program framework, which is overarching and consistent across the country.

With regard to the criteria around eligibility and what we do and don't fund, I have to say that, interestingly enough, that has stayed pretty well consistent ever since the early days of the program. We're there to support women's organizations and other groups that work on women's equality issues. On the various occasions when there have been evaluations or previous parliamentary inquiries, questions related to the criteria were usually addressed in that context.

In terms of strategic direction and how the decisions are made to disburse the money, we have three broad areas of focus: violence, economic, and social justice. I think many different things happen. Because of the ongoing interface with the groups, we have a sense of what the issues and concerns are. We're hearing about emerging issues. Also, because we're part of Status of Women Canada, we benefit from access to the analysis happening within the policy analysis group as well as the research coming out of there. Of course, there are ministerial and government priorities, which are indicated through the speeches from the throne. All of that is taken into consideration.

The last piece that I think fits in there relates to the context at the regional level. Issues related to economic autonomy may be at the top of the agenda in the Atlantic area, but the picture probably looks different in B.C., downtown Toronto, or Quebec. The managers are dealing with that and attempting to determine how best to respond.

Of course, the groups come to us with their submissions. We do not pre-identify, for example, a set of program priorities and say these are the priorities for the year, come and apply to us for that. We're continuously working in an organic way with the organizations and all those other parties I mentioned trying to scan what is going on. This is why we also have a continuous application process. If something major comes up in a community and our deadline for requests has gone by, then it doesn't allow us to be responsive to what's happening.

• (1705)

The Chair: Do you have recommendations in terms of how the program is currently being delivered and how it might be improved?

Ms. Jackie Claxton: In the broader context there's the whole question of being able to dialogue with our potential partners. It's not just restricted to funding. It's related to the broader question of how the department is engaging with key stakeholders. Because our context is so challenging and there is so much demand and there are so many groups out there, if we were able to engage in a more systematic way in terms of seeking input from groups on priority issues and strategies, that would be advantageous. We do it to the best of our ability with the resources we have, but I'm sure that could be done better. I think it would also allow us to put our collective heads together about approaches and strategies to deal with some of the constraints we face on both sides. That's one thing that occurs to me off the top of my head.

The Chair: Thank you.

That's certainly the end of my time.

Does anybody else have any questions?

Then I'm going to say thank you very much for coming here today. I'm sure we're going to see you again in the upcoming weeks. Thank you.

There are a few items of business for the committee. I want to advise both committee members and those who might be here from the larger community that Thursday's meeting will be in camera to allow us to have a more casual, open conversation as we look at the recommendations coming out of the report.

Paddy.

• (1710)

Hon. Paddy Torsney (Burlington, Lib.): There are two things. One, if Thursday's meeting is in camera, is it acceptable that we have our own staff there?

The Chair: You can bring your own staff, yes.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: I don't know who else noticed that we are in this new time slot. I mean, obviously all of us here noticed that we're in a new time slot. Our time slot is until 5:30 on Thursday, and I know that I have a prior commitment that involves a plane ride. I'm just wondering if there is at least a possibility this coming Thursday that we could finish slightly before 5 so we can zip to the plane.

The Chair: I think we can certainly make that effort. What I've asked the clerk to do is to canvass all members of the committee as to other open time slots. If we move, we won't have a priority claim on rooms, I'm told, but I think we might be able to work around that. I'm particularly concerned about colleagues. With all due respect to those of you who come from the east, those of us who travel west, with some of the challenges the airline gives us.... So we're going to try.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: And because this committee does attract a fair bit of attention, if in the seeking of other rooms we can find a larger room for our guests, that would be fine. I would just encourage you not to go to my other committee's time slot, which is 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.—and we're working on that. There's no respect for question period.

The Chair: That's 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. on...?

Hon. Paddy Torsney: It was from 1 p.m. till 3 p.m. today. Question period should not be used as a time period.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Thursday evening isn't really a very good time for me. It's complicated because as a rule, I head back to my riding. It's a four hour drive. Even though I might not live in Western Canada, I still have quite a ways to go. If we could meet on Thursday morning, that would be much more convenient for us.

[*English*]

The Chair: I think what we're going to have to do is canvass all members of the committee. I have a 9 to 11 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. So it's not going to be an easy task trying to find a time when we're all available, but we're going to work on it.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: [*Inaudible—Editor*]...at the Senate.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: But everybody has shifted, so if we could just do it....

The Chair: Everybody's committees have shifted, Lynne.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: I don't know why they all shifted, but they all shifted.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Okay.

The Chair: So we will adjourn early on.... Let me ask the clerk. We're coming over here at 3:30. I wonder if we can start at 3:15 if we come right after.... Is that possible? No? I'm asking Lynne.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I also have to catch a plane on that day, so I'm trying desperately to be replaced. Can we do it earlier in the morning?

The Chair: Let's see what we can do. I don't know that we can do it that fast for this week.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Is it a quick meeting, though?

The Chair: We can make it a quick meeting. Let's start it at 3:15 and try to aim for 4:15. That would help us all.

Mr. Russ Powers: The other one I suggested was on the Tuesday we look at going from say 3:30 to 6:30 or 3:15 to 6:45—in other words, a three-and-a-half-hour meeting just on the Tuesday. That leaves the Thursday. That's one I just throw out.

The Chair: We'll put that down as one of the options in the canvass.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, everybody. The meeting is adjourned.

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