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## **Standing Committee on the Status of Women**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, April 2, 2009**

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**Chair**

**The Honourable Hedy Fry**

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Thursday, April 2, 2009

• (0905)

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)):** Good morning. We have a quorum, so we'll call the meeting to order.

Welcome back to Mr. Pearson. He spent quite a bit of time on this committee before, so it's nice to see you back, Glen.

**Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.):** Pleased to be here.

**The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson):** Welcome to our witnesses this morning. We're certainly pleased to have you here and we're looking forward to hearing your testimony. I believe you've probably been told that you will have ten minutes to make your presentation and then there will be a question and answer period.

We will start with Professor Baker, please.

**Dr. Michael Baker (Professor, Department of Economics, University of Toronto, As an Individual):** Thank you. Thank you very much for inviting me. I'm happy to be here.

In the area you're investigating, the area I know about is the impact of the maternity and parental leave provisions of the EI system, so that's primarily what I'll talk to. The research I've done in this area has been performed against the background of what I'll claim are the commonly cited goals of maternity leave policy, which include the following.

These leaves provide mothers an opportunity to recover after giving birth, physically. They provide mother and child a period to bond. They promote pre- and post-natal care of the child. They promote the long-run status of women by facilitating employment continuity when giving birth. And finally, they can promote child development.

The research I've done in this area takes two forms. One is an historical look at what's happened over the last 30 years, and the other research is specifically on what the effects were of the 2000 reforms of the EI system, which extended parental leave benefits. Let me start briefly with the historic perspective, and the research is parsed into three segments.

The first segment looks at the period up to 1990. The EI maternity leave benefits were introduced in 1971, but that only provided income compensation. Your rights to job protection were provided by provincial labour standards. So during this period, a lot of provincial labour standards did not actually agree or weren't the

same as the EI provisions, and were slowly, gradually brought up to that level.

Looking at that period, what we find is that those changes in provincial laws did not actually affect the amount of time women were at home with their children post-birth. The provisions were quite modest at that time. We're talking about getting up to about 15 weeks, and presumably women found other ways to stay at home post-birth.

What it did do, however, we found, was increase the probability that women returned to their pre-birth employer after giving birth, and therefore it decreased the proportion of women who quit before giving birth.

The second two major reforms of the EI system in this regard, the 1990 reforms and the 2000 reforms, had to do with parental leave benefits. The 1990 reforms brought in parental leave benefits. The 2000 reforms extended them. These benefits in principle can be taken by either the mother or father, but at least initially they were taken primarily by the mother. That's changing, but changing slowly.

What we found from these two reforms is they had two effects. One is that they did increase the amount of time women were at home with their children post-birth, but also had this effect of increasing the probability that they stayed with their pre-birth employer. That's considered important, because breaks in jobs with birth is one of the reasons women are thought to fall behind men in their labour market earnings as they age. They do not get to accumulate the skills that are specific to a particular job if those keep getting broken off—there are discontinuities, if you want. They're moving up, then they get pushed down, then they move up. So the job continuity is considered an important contributor to the continued economic progress of women.

The second area of the research looks specifically at the 2000 reforms that, if I were to generalize, extended leave from six months to one year. I would argue that when we're thinking of that extension and thinking about why we do that, concerns about child development come to the forefront, and concerns about women's health and women's economic progress take a back burner, because leaves of six months, for most women wanting to return to work, provide the opportunity for the physical recovery from birth and the opportunity to go back to their old employer. So what primarily the extension from six months to one year does is provide more time at home, potentially, with the child.

The evidence we've gotten from looking at this reform includes a number of things—and when I say “we” here, I've completed most of this research with Kevin Milligan, who's an economics professor at the University of British Columbia.

First, we estimate across all mothers that reform in 2000 increased the amount of time women were at home with their children post-birth by about two months, and that was on top of an average stay at home of eight months prior to the reform.

• (0910)

That estimate, though, includes some mothers who couldn't actually take advantage of this. Estimates are that about a quarter of mothers have no insured employment prior to giving birth and therefore cannot qualify for EI maternity leave or parental leave benefits.

When we try to focus specifically on the mothers who were eligible, we estimate that the increase in time at home with children was three months, from a pre-reform average of about six months. This represents a 50% increase in the amount of time these mothers were at home with their children after giving birth.

What would these mothers have been doing otherwise, if they weren't at home? It would be primarily full-time work, and their children would primarily be in unlicensed care provided by a non-relative in someone else's home.

Those two facts are important, because other research suggests it's full-time work by mothers in the first year of life that potentially has detrimental effects on child development, and because unlicensed family care is typically not viewed as the highest quality of child care that's available at those ages.

When we think, then, of what might have happened to children as a result of these reforms, we look at two avenues. One is any impact of the change in EI provisions, and of changes in provincial labour standards that increase job protection to match the duration of the EI benefits, upon breastfeeding behaviour.

What are the effects? Breastfeeding is widely viewed as very positive for children, and the most recent research—for example, by Michael Kramer's team at McGill—suggests that it may actually have positive effects on IQ. We find that as a result of the changes in the EI and provincial labour standards in 2000, the duration of breastfeeding in the first year of life went up by one month. Increases in exclusive breastfeeding were on the order of half a month.

What does this mean? I can give you more impressive statistics, but I will have to qualify the point. The proportion of women attaining six months of exclusive breastfeeding, which is a recommendation both of the World Health Organization and of various national medical associations in the developed world, increased by 39%. This sounds big, but we have to remember that the proportions actually achieving six months of exclusive breastfeeding are quite low. So it's a big increase in a small number.

We also find no effect on the incidence of breastfeeding; that is, it didn't change the proportion of women who actually started to breastfeed.

Corresponding with this were reductions on the order of 50% in the proportion of mothers who introduced food because they had to return to work or who stopped breastfeeding because they had to return to work. This is important, I think, because when we think of the various strategies governments take to promote breastfeeding, they typically focus on education—either letting mothers know the benefits of breastfeeding or helping them actually establish breastfeeding in the first weeks of life.

That clearly is important, but to achieve goals such as six months of exclusive breastfeeding or two years of breastfeeding with food, clearly education isn't going to do the trick, when most mothers claim that the reason they stop is that they have to return to work. We have to look at a different set of policies.

So this is evidence that maternity leave and parental leave, in terms of both job protection and income replacement, which is the primary function of EI, have a positive effect on breastfeeding behaviour of mothers in Canada.

When we turn to child development or health, we don't find much. Here we are relying on data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth. In terms of health, we don't find any strong effects on children's health or mothers' health. This includes information on mothers' depression, on any postpartum problems, on children's overall health, or the incidence of specific ailments, including asthma, bronchitis—primarily respiratory diseases.

• (0915)

We also don't find any effects on children's development—and this is early development: measures of their temperament, their socio-motor development, or their achievement of certain milestones up to 24 months of age.

These are very early measures of development. Because the reform was so recent and data takes a while to come out, we can now only observe children who were exposed to the longer provision, the longer duration of parental and maternity leave, up to about 24 months. Data has just come out—I say this because I was actually working on it last Tuesday—that is now going to let us look at children up to age four and five who were exposed to this new regime. At this point we'll start getting some cognitive developmental indicators: their ability to recognize numbers, their ability to read. This is potentially important, as I said, because there is other evidence that suggests breastfeeding may have important implications for IQ.

So overall, as I said, my specific knowledge in this area is the effect of EI with respect to maternity and parental leave.

**The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson):** Could I ask you to wrap up now, please?

**Dr. Michael Baker:** I'm wrapping.

**The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson):** Thank you.

**Dr. Michael Baker:** I'll leave it there.

**The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson):** Thank you very much.

We will now go to Professor Lightman, please, for ten minutes.

**Mr. Ernie Lightman (Professor, University of Toronto, As an Individual):** Thank you very much.

I'd like to thank the members of the committee for inviting me here this morning to give me the opportunity to talk about one of the most important policy issues affecting Canada, affecting women particularly, today.

I'm an economist by training, but for the last 35 years I've been a professor in the faculty of social work at the University of Toronto. I left mainstream economics because I was very frustrated with its inability to go beyond looking at numbers, and teaching in the school of social work gives me the opportunity to interact with what's going on at ground level, with what's going on in the world.

I'm in regular contact with students who are doing placements in social agencies, recent graduates who are working in social agencies, so I have the opportunity to see and to hear essentially first-hand what the consequences are of cutbacks in the welfare state in general and particularly in the substantial exclusion of women from the EI system.

I've also been doing research for the last seven years, research funded by SSHRC, in which we've been looking at the impacts of precarious work, most specifically in Ontario. By precarious work, of course, I mean work that is insecure, unstable, of limited duration, part-time, contract only, no benefits.

I'd like to begin with two anecdotes that follow from that, both of them experienced yesterday. I stayed at the Lord Elgin Hotel last night, and when I arrived a group of union members were demonstrating outside the hotel. I had to cross a picket line to go into the hotel, which made me very unhappy. They were mostly women. They were employed by the Holiday Inn in Longueuil, and this hotel has the same ownership, apparently, as the Lord Elgin. They've been locked out for eight months. That means over the winter.

I talked to them for a while before I crossed the picket line, which I thought was the best thing to do under the circumstances, and they're mostly women and they are asking for a salary increase of 3% a year for four years, which does not strike me as unreasonable. They have been offered 2% a year for six years, which of course will just further lock them into poverty.

Anecdote number two: I came into my room, turned on my TV, and saw that Premier McGuinty had just announced \$9 billion in infrastructure, essentially in construction, that's going to help the TTC build a lot of streetcars and things like that, and of course this is all men who are going to benefit from this. I believe women constitute about 7% of the labour force in the construction industry.

The important thing to understand is that impacts of the cuts in EI are not gender-neutral. They affect women far more than they affect men. Historically, EI was an intermediate.... I view it as a trampoline, that if people lost a job, they would bounce onto EI. If they were lucky, they could use that time on EI to go back into the labour market. But if that middle tier, that tier of EI, is removed, they go directly onto welfare, and welfare is what I've been studying for the last seven years. It's not something a lot of people study, but its experience is subject to a wide variety of different rules and

regulations and constraints and intrusions that people on EI don't experience.

Not very long ago women on welfare were subject to the spouse-in-the-house rule. An unnamed former premier of Ontario made the comment after he was elected in 1995 that a one-night stand was sufficient to constitute an ongoing support relationship. This is what life on welfare is like.

In Ontario today, a person on welfare is subject to an asset ceiling of \$500. That means that if someone loses their job and they don't qualify for EI, as large numbers of women don't, they go right to welfare. Before they can claim welfare, they have to divest themselves of all assets except for \$500. That means in many cases they can't even keep a car, which they need in order to look for a job. Welfare unfortunately is still caught in the Victorian poor law mentality of blame the victim, not really wanting to give people a hand up, but rather more like giving them a kick in the head.

● (0920)

If EI is not there to protect them, they go right on to welfare. Once they're on welfare, it is a hard system to get off. It is increasingly a hard system to get off as the economy deteriorates.

I have some data that looked at the welfare caseloads in the city of Toronto. In December 2008, 71% of the people who applied for Ontario Works were recycling, meaning they had been on it before. Why? What does that mean? What that means is that 71% of the people who go on welfare have not been able to make a break from welfare. They are stuck; they are trapped. They get a precarious job—they get hired by Sears in November and then they get laid off in January, or they only have part-time work.

I did manage to run off some data—and I'm sure you're familiar with this data and you've had it presented to you—that is based on the 2006 SLID survey. One-third of women work less than 250 hours. That compares to 21% of men who work under 250 hours. So women aren't going to qualify for EI. Among those who have permanent jobs, it's men who have the full-time jobs and women who have the part-time jobs. I've got the numbers, but if I just read them out, they won't mean much. With the part-time jobs, again, they don't qualify for EI.

If we think about going forward and the kinds of recommendations—because I want to get these out on the table—the idea of extending the eligibility for those who receive is not going to help women, because women don't receive it in the first place. It's a male-supportive policy from a government that seems singularly insensitive to the needs of women.

Increasing the replacement rate is also not going to do it, because increasing the replacement rate will only benefit those who get on the system. The way to benefit women is to reduce the hours of eligibility. That's the solution. That's the only way that the EI system is going to start to meet the needs of women.

The other issue, of course, is that women often can't do the work they're expected to do, or would like to do, because of child care problems. One hundred dollars a month is not going to buy child care for anybody. In Quebec, the situation is different. They're very fortunate, and I am envious. I wish the rest of Canada had a program like that. In the rest of Canada, because women don't get child care, because this government killed the child care program that was in place and replaced it with nothing, women are increasingly put in a situation where they won't be able to work, and they won't be able to qualify for the hours.

I think that probably takes care of my ten minutes. I'll quit there. Thank you very much.

• (0925)

**The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson):** Thank you.

We'll now move to Professor MacDonald, please, for ten minutes.

**Dr. Martha MacDonald (Professor, Economics Department, Saint Mary's University, As an Individual):** Thank you very much for inviting me. I am very pleased to be able to present.

I'm an economist also, and I have written widely on how every income security policy plays out differently for men and women, given that they have different labour market patterns and caregiving responsibilities. One has to be very careful to avoid implicit gender biases in the parameters of the program.

I began looking at EI when it was first introduced, and early on I wrote an article on expected impacts of the reform, including gender differences. In general, the new program parameters reflected a male norm of full-time, continuous work, which made it more difficult for women and others whose work patterns differed from this.

Like others who you've probably heard present, I anticipated the impacts as being, first, that the eligibility requirements and duration of benefits were calculated such that the change to hours hurt anyone working less than 35 hours per week, and as we have heard, that is disproportionately women.

Furthermore, in terms of the re-entrant rules that were introduced, the big increase in hours needed for re-entrants made it particularly difficult for women who may have more labour market interruptions due to caregiving responsibilities.

Third, the formula to calculate benefits, especially the use of a minimum divisor—about which we can talk in more detail later—penalized anybody with irregular or fluctuating earnings. Again, that was an issue for women as well as other precarious workers, as Ernie has mentioned.

The application of the new EI parameters to parental and maternity benefits was also problematic.

And finally, access to training became more tied to EI eligibility, which also meant that women and other precarious workers were having more difficulty accessing the kind of programs that might help them get into better jobs.

Since that article, I conducted three evaluation reports for HRSDC on EI, each of which emphasized impacts on women. The first one I won't talk about, unless you're interested later. The first one looked at

the family supplement which tops up benefits for low-income families with dependent children.

The second evaluation study I worked on addressed EI's impact on work/life balance. When we were asked to do this, the anticipation was that we would look at maternity and parental benefits, which clearly relate directly to work/life balance issues, but we chose to focus mainly on regular benefits. The main issue with the regular benefits is the structure of work incentives embedded in the program. In that study we noted that the EI rules reward work patterns that can be shown to be associated with increased stress and work/life balance difficulties, such as long hours and multiple job holding. The rules encourage the more work, the better, the packaging of jobs to get up to the hours you need, and so on. Whether it's the long hours of the male or the female spouse, those are problematic for families.

Work patterns that might be helpful with work/life balance, such as working part-time, are not well protected by EI, nor is any support provided for the work/life balance stresses parents face beyond that first year of parenting. Of course, we found the stresses with slightly older children to be very great. It is not just the first year that is an issue.

The third HRSDC study I worked on focused on EI and seasonal workers. I have done a lot of research with workers in resource-dependent rural communities, particularly in Atlantic Canada. So among the group of precarious workers that Ernie mentioned, I'm particularly interested in seasonal workers. Many seasonal workers actually benefited from the EI switch to hours, as they often work long hours for short periods; however, women did less well under that system. In seasonal industries, women are more likely to work fewer hours and are more likely to have fluctuating earnings, jeopardizing their eligibility and benefit rates compared to men.

The benefit formula with the minimum divisor makes it especially difficult in seasonal industries. It makes it difficult for employers who can't fill jobs unless they can offer 14 steady weeks of work, and it lowered the benefits workers received.

• (0930)

Some of these issues have been addressed, particularly with the pilot project that will calculate benefits based on the best 14 weeks of earnings, but that's only in certain high-unemployment regions.

The re-entrant rules make it almost impossible for a seasonal worker to qualify again for EI if they have a bad year or miss a year, whether that's for caregiving or because of something that happens in the industry. So there's a great incentive to stay on this EI work treadmill.

The final study that I did recently related to EI reviewed the changes that have been made since 1996, in terms of how well they serve women and whether the gender concerns that have been identified since the beginning have been addressed. In that research, I looked at both regular EI and the caregiving benefits under special benefits: maternity, parental, and the compassionate care benefit.

In general EI as a whole reinforces women's responsibility for caregiving. Women's entitlements are still primarily based on their caregiving role. If you look at overall EI, women are now getting as much, or more, of those dollars than men, but it's all entirely due to the special benefits, while their share of regular benefits and the percentage of unemployed women who receive regular benefits have declined.

The changes made during that ten years do not respond to the gender-related complaints that have been raised over ten years.

One other point from that study is that the program parameters for the caregiving benefits reinforce women taking the leaves rather than men. The low-income replacement rates, for example, reinforce the lower earner taking the leave. So the parameters of the existing parental maternity benefits are not doing a good job of sharing the caregiving workload. And on the regular benefits side, the program is not facilitating women being equal labour market participants.

I think I have a couple of minutes, so I'm going to—

**The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson):** Yes, you do.

**Dr. Martha MacDonald:** Those just give you an idea of the kinds of areas I've looked at.

I thought about some recommendations, some of which we can return to in the discussion. But I'll just mention a few, based on my research.

For all benefits, both regular and special benefits, I would recommend dropping the minimum divisor in calculating average earnings and therefore benefits. It's an extra penalty, again rewarding longer hours. It's particularly difficult for any precarious workers, what they actually get—my students keep saying, well, you get 55% of your earnings. But you don't, at the end of the day, and the minimum divisor contributes to that.

Also in terms of benefit amounts, I agree with using the best weeks of earnings as the basis of calculating that, and that's what's in the pilot project now, with the 14 best weeks. So I think that should be extended. The formula, basically, for calculating average earnings should be neutral with regard to the timing of work. It shouldn't be rewarding one work pattern and penalizing another.

For regular benefits, obviously the key thing is adjusting the formulas for eligibility, which Ernie mentioned. So the way the hours formula plays out for any part-time workers is an issue. Also, the hours formula on the duration side of things is problematic. So part-time workers are having trouble qualifying, and they're penalized on the duration side as well. They already get benefits proportional to their earnings, so they're already getting that difference. But the double penalty on the duration side that came with EI is problematic.

The hours needed for re-entrance are very problematic for anybody who's been out of the labour market with caregiving

responsibilities or for seasonal workers, unless you're just coming off a parental leave, and then you're exempted. But there are other reasons that people take time out of the labour market beyond that first year. So those should be reduced—

• (0935)

**The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson):** Could you wrap up now, please?

**Dr. Martha MacDonald:** Okay. I'll just make one comment about special benefits generally and we can come back to that.

In general, special benefits should be designed with a different logic from that of regular benefits. The program elements that are intended to improve work incentives in the regular EI program make no sense in a program like parental leave, where the intent is actually to facilitate leave taking. We're not trying to ensure that people don't abuse the program and that they get back to work. We are saying we want people to have this leave. It has these health benefits. Yet many of the program parameters are applied to the parental maternity leave. That would include things like the waiting period. It would include things like the logic of not covering self-employed workers. There's no logic for that if we're talking about parental maternity leave.

Again, the final thing there would be some flexibility in terms of how parents want to use that. A model for that would be the Quebec program, where you can have higher replacement rates that encourage higher earners to take it with shorter periods, or you could have a longer leave with a lower replacement rate, etc., but some flexibility.

**The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson):** Sorry to cut you off, Professor, but we have to share the time here.

**Dr. Martha MacDonald:** I'm fine. I'm finished.

**The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson):** Thank you very much. Perhaps some of the things can be fleshed out in the question and answer period.

We'll move now to Professor Schirle, please.

**Dr. Tammy Schirle (Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Wilfrid Laurier University, As an Individual):** I would like to thank you for providing me with the opportunity to present my views on the employment insurance program.

I plan to address two questions here. First, and very briefly, given access to benefits, what are the effects of various EI provisions on women in terms of the labour market behaviour of their outcomes? Secondly, should we be concerned about whether men and women have equitable access to EI benefits?

These questions should be examined within the context of the objectives of the EI program. EI's objectives do not appear to be clearly defined within the legislation. However, I would suggest there are three goals here. First, EI protects individuals from unexpected earnings losses associated with unemployment. Regular EI benefits provide this type of income support. Secondly, the programs help unemployed persons be productive participants in the labour force. To this end, for example, we have provisions that allow some individuals to receive support for training and education. Thirdly, EI promotes continuity in employment and attachment to the labour force. To this end, the provisions for maternity and parental leave, the allowances for seasonal employment and temporary layoff, may facilitate continued employment with the same employer.

Most often, economists are concerned with the extent to which policy will distort the decisions made by individuals. In the literature you can find several examples of how particular EI provisions change the labour market decisions and outcomes of individuals. For example, a study by David Green and Craig Riddell at the University of British Columbia demonstrated that when you extend the qualifying period for unemployment insurance, individuals will remain employed longer. David Gray's work at the University of Ottawa suggests that frequent EI users are sensitive to changes in benefit calculation formulas such that expansions of the program to cover non-standard employment arrangements may have unintended repercussions.

To my knowledge, we do not have a great amount of evidence on whether there exists a gender difference in the extent to which individuals will adjust their work arrangements to qualify for regular EI benefits. Obviously, we expect to see gender differences in the effects of EI maternity leave provisions. Michael Baker has already spoken to that extensively, where his research with Kevin Milligan has shown that the expansion of maternity and parental leave allowances in the late 1990s led to a substantial increase in the time mothers got to spend at home. More importantly, the provision of maternity leave benefits of any length will increase job continuity with the same employer.

Consider that any policy that increases women's labour force attachment and continuity with employers will have important long-run implications. In my recent research I have shown that the most recent groups of women entering retirement have greater access than previous groups to employer-provided pension plans and Canada Pension Plan benefits. This came with a greater attachment to the labour force in career employment, which in turn can be attributed in part to the legalization of the birth control pill. EI maternity and parental leave policy should lead to even greater access to public and private pensions among women.

Consider, then, the second question: Do men and women have equitable access to EI benefits? To examine access to regular EI benefits, I took a sample from the employment insurance coverage survey and measured the number of individuals who had received EI benefits since their last job as a portion of involuntarily unemployed individuals aged 25 to 44. Here in the sample, to note, I've excluded any mothers of infants and anyone who was self-employed.

A gender gap in the likelihood of receiving EI benefits when unemployed clearly exists. In my sample, 68% of unemployed

women and 75% of unemployed men had received EI benefits since their last job.

I undertook a simple decomposition of that gender gap, and not surprisingly found that nearly 40% of the gap could be attributed to gender differences in work arrangements. Note that roughly 80% of employed women work full-time. Nearly 10% of unemployed women and only 2% of the unemployed men in my sample worked in permanent part-time jobs. Thirty-two percent of women work in non-permanent positions—this is not including the seasonal jobs—compared to 23% of men in such non-permanent positions.

Clearly, we expect that any individual in a full-time, permanent position will be more likely eligible for EI benefits than those in part-time, casual employment. This clearly fits EI objectives to provide income support for unexpected earnings losses associated with unexpected periods of unemployment. From the decomposition I also found that more than one-fifth of the gender gap in access can be attributed to gender differences in career paths, as characterized by the industry and occupation of their previous employment. While men tend to work in construction and manufacturing industries, particularly in positions of transport or equipment operations, women are more likely to work in retail, accommodation, and food services, in sales and services positions.

The resulting gap in EI access might be attributed to the industry differences in average hours within full-time or part-time classifications. I suspect there are also some industries and occupations where casual workers' hours are less likely insured.

Should we, then, modify EI to close the gender gap in EI access?

● (0940)

Overall, if you were to compare access to EI among comparable men and women—that is, men and women with the same work arrangements, same career paths, and so on—you would find that men and women have equal access to EI benefits. The differences in access are easily explained by the different labour market choices made by men and women.

Let us assume that on average women are rational, with a basic understanding of probability. Then we can say that when a woman chooses to take on part-time or casual employment instead of full-time permanent employment, she is aware of her lower likelihood to have access to many employment benefits. She is unlikely to have a pension plan or health benefits, she will not contribute as much to her Canada Pension Plan, and she will be less likely to qualify for EI benefits if she is out of work. These are the costs associated with her choice.

The benefits of her work arrangement will include more flexibility with her time, in many cases allowing her to take on home-production activities, such as child care and other family responsibilities. This choice is optimal in the sense that it is best for that individual.

Note that only a small portion of women working part-time jobs do so involuntarily. Within my sample of unemployed individuals in the Employment Insurance Coverage Survey, only 9% of those women are involuntarily part-time.

To suggest that we need to change the EI program so that the women working part-time or casually are more likely to qualify suggests one of two things to me. First, it might suggest that we do not believe women are able to act rationally or understand the implications of their choices. I do not think we have any reason to believe that and I would personally take offence at that suggestion. Second, it might suggest that Canadians want to encourage home-production activities by subsidizing the choice to take part-time and casual employment. This is certainly not a policy objective of the EI program, and achieving such objectives is best left to other policy levers.

A more appropriate policy action would be to ensure that women have equal access to the full-time permanent jobs in those careers likely to lead to EI benefit access. This has generally been the goal of affirmative action programs and even of pay equity legislation. Again, this does not require modifications to the EI program.

Over the years we have seen a greater tendency for women to take on full-time employment and have seen some reductions in occupational gender segregation. If we expect these trends to continue, we should expect the gender gap to narrow over time. As long as women are primarily responsible for home production, however, some gap will remain as women choose to take part-time employment. Further reductions of that gap could be achieved, for example, through the implementation of national child care programs.

It is important to remark on the fact that modifications to EI to accommodate non-standard work arrangements will have important impacts on the choices made by men and women. Any accommodation will likely create an incentive for men and women to take on less secure employment and develop a long-term dependency on the EI program. This will make the program much more expensive, will make its role as insurance questionable, and certainly does not meet the objectives of promoting labour force attachment or job continuity. Furthermore, as all modifications to the program must apply to men and women equally, the gender gap in EI may persist regardless.

Overall, I would strongly recommend against modifying the EI program to accommodate non-standard work arrangements, as it is not clear that such modifications will support the objectives of the program, and other policy options appear more desirable to support the interests of women.

As a final note, I would like to point out that there are several people, male and female, who will never qualify for EI benefits yet who have to make contributions. It seems unreasonable to require that people pay insurance premiums toward insurance they could never benefit from.

For example, to be eligible for regular EI benefits in a high-unemployment region, a typical person must have had 420 insurable hours in the previous 52 weeks. On average, this person must have worked more than eight hours per week at all jobs combined. Introducing a year's basic exemption to EI premiums based on an individual's annual earnings with all employers, not a single employer, might be a reasonable solution to consider here. The provision of benefits to these individuals would otherwise require benefit qualifications to depend on weeks worked rather than on

hours, and it is not clear how the number of weeks should be defined.

That is all I have to say for now.

Thanks.

• (0945)

**The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson):** Thank you very much.

We will move now to our last presenter, Carole Vincent, please.

**Ms. Carole Vincent (Senior Research Associate, Social Research and Demonstration Corporation):** Good morning.

Ms. Vice-Chair and members of the committee, I want to thank you for inviting me today to speak here, and for giving me the opportunity to present some lessons that arise from SRDC's—the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation's—research about the complex realities of patterns of work and reliance on employment insurance benefits.

I'm also an economist, and over the past eight years I've been involved in a number of research projects at SRDC that looked at the adequacy of the EI program, which have led to a number of suggestions for improving the program.

I hope my presentation will contribute to a better understanding of the extent to which the EI program reflects current labour market realities and provides adequate support to the increasing number of Canadian women who participate in the labour market and often need to balance their work and family responsibilities.

The examination of a program like EI is one of the most challenging tasks facing the government in the area of income security, since various and often competing factors come into play. It's important at this point to re-examine the role the EI program plays in supporting the economic security of all Canadians, and in particular the economic security of Canadian women.

It's interesting to note that the subject of these hearings is to examine the effects and consequences of the EI programs. And I emphasize the plural form of program as the EI program is usually referred to in the singular. I agree that there is indeed more than one EI program to the extent that different EI benefits are paid to different people in different circumstances and in many different ways.

The EI program pays over \$10 billion each year in income benefits to individuals, providing financial assistance every month to thousands of workers who find themselves without a job. And through the provision of sickness, maternity, parental, and compassionate leave benefits, EI also provides assistance to workers who have interruptions in employment for personal reasons, making the program more integral to all Canadians' life decisions.

The major reform of 1996 introduced what is called an hour-based system; however, not every hour of work is treated equally under EI. The EI rules, which are quite complex, give rise to major disparities—and some may call them inequities—in the extent to which workers who pay premiums into the program can benefit from it. Workers who have work patterns or work schedules that best fit the EI rules for eligibility and calculation of benefits will benefit more from EI.

In recent years, considerable debate has taken place about whom the EI program is intended for and how successful it is in protecting its target clientele. Since all paid workers and their employers are required to contribute to EI, but the receipt of benefits is restricted to those who meet its eligibility requirements, an outcome of particular interest is the extent to which unemployed Canadians have access to benefits.

There are different ways to look at it and, Tammy, you presented it in one way. But often we look at the benefit to unemployment ratio, so the proportion of the unemployed who are eligible for benefits under the program rules has been in decline since the early 1990s, down to about 45% according to the Statistics Canada EI coverage survey. This proportion is even lower in certain regions where the unemployment rates are lower and the minimum number of hours to qualify for benefits is higher.

The unemployed who are not eligible for EI benefits are not eligible for different reasons. Some of them did not accumulate enough hours to qualify for benefits, even though they are insured under EI and pay premiums. Others are not receiving benefits because they are not insured under EI, since they have never worked, have been unemployed for more than a year, or because they are self-employed and so do not contribute to the program. Others have left their job for reasons not deemed valid under the program rules, including going back to school.

Who are those workers who contributed to the EI program but do not work sufficient hours to receive benefits? As you know, women represent a disproportionate share of paid workers who don't qualify for EI. In 2006, 15% of female paid workers contributed to the EI program but did not work sufficient hours to qualify for benefits, compared with only 8% of men. Young people are another large group.

● (0950)

Many of those who receive EI benefits are workers who experience predictable—often seasonal and recurrent—breaks in employment. Over recent years, the proportion of claimants of regular EI benefits who were frequent claimants has increased, representing close to 40% of all claims for regular benefits.

Frequent reliance on EI can result from workers becoming familiar with the program and learning how to take advantage of its rules and provisions. To some extent, the EI program itself may be part of the problem because of specific rules and provisions that actually reward workers and employers for adopting certain behaviours that lead to reliance on EI.

What our research has shown is that in many cases, workers' reliance on EI is a symptom of their difficulty in finding stable or more meaningful employment, due to inadequate skills or inadequate

recognition of their skills, insufficient education, or limited job opportunities in their region. Policies that focus narrowly on addressing workers' frequent reliance on EI, therefore, are misdirected. Instead, policies should more broadly address the barriers to employment faced by workers who are not well equipped to realize their full potential in the labour market, whether they rely on EI or not.

Our research indicates that while some workers who face barriers to finding more secure employment are able to find jobs that enable them to qualify for EI benefits, there are many more workers who face those same barriers but are unable to qualify for benefits. Again, a disproportionate share of these non-claimants are women. They are the most likely to be working multiple low-paying jobs, which often only offer part-time employment. They live in all regions across Canada, including regions where better employment opportunities have not necessarily led to more stable employment for them.

Historically, the EI program has been seen as an insurance-based program. However, EI has evolved in ways that have moved it away from its insurance-based principles. The 1996 reform introduced EI part two benefits, which provide direct assistance to the unemployed through various employment benefit and support measures, with a focus on helping disadvantaged groups reach their full potential by supporting their participation in activities that will improve their employability.

In the early 2000s, the coverage of the EI program was considerably extended to provide more generous parental leave benefits, and through the enrichment of parental benefits and the more recent addition of six weeks of compassionate leave benefits, the EI program is increasingly providing assistance to workers who have interruptions in employment for reasons that are to some degree foreseeable, planned, and voluntary. While those benefits are aimed at assisting workers who must balance work with their family responsibilities, they are seen by many as a move away from an insurance-based program.

These moves away from insurance principles reflect a major shift in values that could motivate further EI reform. An important issue, however, is whether there are better ways to improve the income security of Canadians who must balance work and family responsibilities.

In Quebec, a distinct program was introduced in 2006 that provides maternity, paternity, and parental leave benefits to all workers outside the EI program. Its coverage extends to those who are self-employed and those who work fewer than 600 hours, which is the threshold to qualify for maternity benefits under EI, provided they earn at least \$2,000 during the year.

This program is more generous and also offers flexibility to insured parents: earnings replacement rates can go up to 75% of insurable earnings, and the threshold of maximum insurable earnings is \$62,000, compared with only \$41,000 under EI. The program also provides for up to five weeks of benefits exclusively to the father. In 2006, 56% of fathers eligible for paternity benefits took advantage of the program in Quebec, compared with only 10% of eligible fathers in the rest of Canada.

The Quebec government announced this week that benefits paid to parents under the program are higher than expected and that this year the government will have to inject \$300 million into the fund out of general tax revenues to cover the cost of the program. The issue of using general tax revenues to pay for those benefits is currently being debated.

• (0955)

In conclusion, when considering possible options to improve the EI program and make the program more responsive to the current labour market realities of Canadian women, we should revisit the rules for eligibility for benefits. Specifically, we should examine means by which these rules could address the issue of the disproportionate share of women who have work schedules that do not qualify them to receive regular benefits, even though they are required to pay premiums into the program.

Also, in light of the increasing proportion of Canadian women who must balance work and family responsibilities, we should examine whether special benefits such as maternity and parental benefits and benefits for compassionate leave should be part of an EI program. We should consider alternative options for eligibility and generosity of those benefits that would lead to more adequate income support to Canadian women during planned and foreseeable interruptions in employment due to family responsibilities. The Quebec program is one example, and other OECD countries offer other models.

Thank you.

**The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson):** Thank you very much.

I would like to thank each of the presenters this morning. We certainly have had some good information from every one of you.

We will now go to our first round of questioning, for seven minutes.

Madame Zarac, please.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.):** My first question is for Mr. Lightman.

According to your studies, the erosion of the social safety net is a consequence of lower-paying jobs. However, you did not mention training. Do you think that training programs may help to counteract this situation? We are fully aware that current training is not aimed at women to the same extent. If you agree with that, I would like to know what type of program would be useful, in your opinion.

[English]

**Mr. Ernie Lightman:** Certainly training is a large part of any kind of medium-term, long-term solution. I think one of the problems is that in certain conditions people who are on social assistance are essentially prevented from participating in training programs. In Ontario, which is the province I know the most about, the philosophy for people on welfare is the shortest route to a job—that's the phrase—the shortest route to a job, and any job is a good job. So this leads to the cycling on and off, because people go on jobs and can't keep them and they're essentially prevented from entering training programs.

• (1000)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Lise Zarac:** As part of the employment insurance program, should we not be providing training that is designed to prevent people from becoming welfare recipients?

[English]

**Mr. Ernie Lightman:** Somebody should be offering training so people don't wind up on welfare. EI is part of it, but I think it also has to depend on the education systems and a variety of other systems. But in the long-term, training is the only way we're going to break the cycle of people going into short-term jobs, then back on welfare, short-term jobs, back on welfare. There is no alternative to training, and training is rather appallingly delivered in most cases today.

**Mrs. Lise Zarac:** Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Baker, I really like your comments. I have two grandchildren and I believe that we need to give parents an opportunity to spend more time with their children at the beginning. Thank you for your concern.

Do you believe that Quebec's program enables women to remain with their children who develop better as a result?

[English]

**Dr. Michael Baker:** I'll probably be better prepared to answer that question in a year. Kevin and I are currently working on exactly that project. The Quebec reforms offer a couple of really good opportunities. One, as has already been mentioned, is this period of time reserved for fathers. One huge gap in research is the possible effects of paternal care during early childhood. We don't have a lot of evidence. Intuitively, it seems good that fathers are at home, but we don't have a lot of studies that look into that.

The other big gap in the literature—again, some of this might seem odd, and we don't have a lot of evidence on it—is how people's choices respond to income replacement rates. The Quebec reforms offer shorter leaves, with higher replacement rates. We're hoping to use those changes to see how people respond to them to get some idea of how much more likely it is that people stay home. Do they stay home longer if their incomes are replaced at higher rates?

Kevin may be writing those data today.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Lise Zarac:** We will have to ask you to come back again.

I have another question. Do I still have time left?

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson):** Yes, you do.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Lise Zarac:** Ms. Schirle, you stated that only 9% of women choose to work part-time. That concerns me somewhat because there are factors involved. Are you looking at the factors that influence these choices? Someone may decide to return to work on a part-time basis because there are no day cares or they are too expensive. Have these factors been studied? If so, which factors have you studied?

[English]

**Dr. Tammy Schirle:** I can speak to those statistics.

I'm a numbers person, and that number comes from the February 2009 labour force survey. I took a sample of all women who are currently employed part-time, and 9.3% of them said they were working part-time because of business conditions and they couldn't find full-time work, and they had looked. In comparison to that, 38% of women working part-time are working part-time because they're caring for their own children.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Lise Zarac:** I am sorry to interrupt you, but we do not have much time. Did that study look at specific questions? Did you dig deeper in order to find out whether or not there were significant factors that influenced the choices those women made. A woman may choose to work part-time, but perhaps she does so because she has other responsibilities. Was there a real attempt to dissect the reasons why she made that choice?

[English]

**Dr. Tammy Schirle:** No.

This is raw data from the labour force survey. They ask people questions like why they are working part-time, which is less than 30 hours per week. First they are asked if that's because they want to. If they want to, is it because they want to care for their children, or is it because of a personal preference and this type of thing.

• (1005)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Lise Zarac:** As I said, there may be many different factors involved.

Thank you very much.

[English]

Do I still have time?

**The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson):** You have eight seconds left.

We'll move on now to Madame Demers for seven minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much for coming here today. We have been working on this employment insurance study for a few weeks already, and we are always learning something new. So I am very pleased to welcome you here.

Professor Lightman, I was particularly moved by your study on welfare. We know that it is currently a real scourge. In Quebec, we are now even on a third generation of people on welfare. I find it very unfortunate that women do not have access to training so that they can get off welfare.

In Quebec, we set up the *Chantier de l'économie sociale* in 1995. This led to the creation of small businesses that see themselves responsible for providing opportunities to welfare recipients. This program works quite well because these people are given at least a year or a year and a half to get used to holding a regular job.

Last week, we heard a witness from a rural community who told us that the program set up by the government was wonderful for women because it enabled them to work in non-traditional trades, such as construction. This also enabled them to obtain training, and so on.

You do not appear to agree with this premise. In your opinion, what are the shortcomings or flaws in this program? Could you tell us how we could better serve women from rural and urban communities?

[English]

**Mr. Ernie Lightman:** The question didn't follow directly from the comments.

One of the problems with studying welfare is that it varies so much from province to province. I'm not an expert on Quebec, but I do know that the attitudes in Quebec, in general, are much more progressive than they are in the rest of the country in terms of most social problems.

I have a PhD student now who is looking at the problems of precarious work in northern, rural, isolated areas. She's looking mainly at northern Ontario and northern British Columbia, and she's finding that most social policies we develop are based on a city-centred mentality. The notion on welfare, for example, of having to do a job search, as required to look for jobs, works fine if you live in the city and have a bus pass, and you can go around from door to door. But if you live in a small town, if you live in a rural or an isolated area where there may only be one employer, and if that employer shuts down, the concept of a job search really has no meaning.

She hasn't got her conclusions yet, but clearly a lot of the policies, in general, have an urban bias to them. And when we apply them to rural and isolated areas they just don't fit; they don't work.

It appears from meeting with many of the welfare administrators who work in the northern parts of Ontario that the way they deal with these problems is they just ignore the rules that come from Toronto. On issues like job searches, they understand that this is meaningless. It's never written down, and I can't prove this, but what they are telling my student is that everybody just ignores it because it's a waste of time and it's demeaning.

Even training opportunities under EI are much more problematic in isolated areas because a person may have to drive four or five hours to get to a training site. So I'm not convinced that widespread training is going to be viable in really isolated areas.

I'm not sure what the answer is.

[Translation]

**Ms. Nicole Demers:** Thank you.

Professor Baker, today is Autism Awareness Day, in Canada and around the world, I believe. In the cohort of children you studied, were you able to determine whether having the mother at home with her child for the first few months of life made it easier to detect a problem with the child such as autism, for instance?

[English]

**Dr. Michael Baker:** Unfortunately, the data we are using are from the national longitudinal survey of children and youth. It is not primarily a health survey; it's a survey of children's development.

In Canada we lack a large-scale children's health survey. As a consequence, the number of ailments actually covered in these other data sets is not large. There is no information on autism in the data we looked at.

• (1010)

[Translation]

**Ms. Nicole Demers:** I must tell you, however, that in Quebec, we will certainly be paying more taxes because the parental leave program is more expensive. But we are happy to do it because it is important to support programs like that. We understand this in Quebec. So my money goes to the right place.

Ms. Schirle, I was also very surprised to hear your statistics on people who choose to find a job and adapt it to employment insurance rules. You mentioned it too, Ms. Vincent. I find that very surprising, because according to what Professor Lightman was saying, there are welfare recipients who find a job, even if it is only for two months, not to have access to employment insurance, but to feel better about themselves, to work. People want to work. I believe that it is human nature to want to be part of society. And in order to be part of society, you have to be in the society. So I find it somewhat surprising and even shocking that you would say that people find jobs that will give them access to employment insurance, and that this is the only type of employment that some people look for.

[English]

**Dr. Tammy Schirle:** I realize that I probably sound very cold-hearted in my comments.

[Translation]

**Ms. Nicole Demers:** Yes.

[English]

**Dr. Tammy Schirle:** I realize this.

I am very sympathetic to people who are in circumstances that make it very difficult for them to work. That is not a majority of the population. I think there are a lot of women who choose to work part-time. They like spending time at home with their kids. They like being able to take the kids to school every morning and meet them after school at the end of the day. That's why they work part-time. Is that a bad choice? No.

[Translation]

**Ms. Nicole Demers:** I was talking about men, not women.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson):** Madame Demers, thank you very much.

[Translation]

**Ms. Nicole Demers:** Generally speaking, some individuals adjust...

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson):** I'm sorry.

[Translation]

**Ms. Nicole Demers:** Madam Chair, I have others.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson):** We'll move on now to Madame Boucher, please, for seven minutes.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC):** Good morning, everyone. Welcome to our round table. I always find it interesting to hear from you. We learn many things and, sometimes, some of them strike home.

One thing I heard was that women have been harder hit than men by the economic crisis and that this has always been the case. In early March, I read an article published in *La Presse*. This article appeared on March 2 and it was written by Mathieu Perreault. Let me quote from the article:

[Translation] Recessions hit men more than women. Since October, twice as many men as women have lost their jobs in Canada, even though there are about as many of them in the workforce. [...] The difference is even more striking in Quebec, where 30,000 of the 31,000 jobs lost during this period were held by men.

Today, a number of witnesses have told the committee the opposite. This is a bit problematic. I would like things explained to me. Mr. Lightman, a little earlier, you talked about infrastructure. You said that men would benefit more from infrastructure. I am a woman, I drive, I use the roads. If the roads are repaired, I benefit as well. So I have my doubts.

We have been listening to witnesses for a good while now. Given what has been said, do you believe that it would better to provide two systems, one for men and one for women? My question is for anyone who wants to answer.

**Ms. Carole Vincent:** For me, the answer is no. I would like to emphasize that the employment insurance program is more advantageous for workers who have a certain type of job. I am not trying to imply that some individuals choose their jobs in order to receive employment insurance benefits. However, employment insurance rules make some types of jobs more easily supported. A strong association with the workforce each year is given priority. People are compensated when they lose their job, even if they lose the job year after year, which is contrary to the concept of an insurance program. The program's rules compensate certain types of workforce behaviour. We see that behaviour more often in men. There are also many men who have the kinds of jobs that are not easily recognized by employment insurance. So it is really about recognizing the various ways of being part of the workforce. Personal circumstances or job opportunities in certain regions are not the only factors that make someone choose a certain type of job. Many people, both men and women but women in particular, are part of the workforce in a way that it is not recognized by employment insurance.

I certainly do not believe in a separate program for men and women, but I do believe in a program that would recognize the wider diversity of ways in which people participate in the workforce, due to family responsibilities or personal choices. It is difficult to talk about personal choice for part-time work. It depends on the circumstances. If this choice was made because there were no employment opportunities in the region, we could perhaps describe the situation as a little more involuntary. However, the concept of voluntary choice for part-time work is quite vague. When there are family constraints and a lack of adequate and affordable daycare, to what extent are these choices voluntary? That is debatable.

•(1015)

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson):** Go ahead, Professor MacDonald.

**Dr. Martha MacDonald:** I just have an answer to the comment that more men have lost their jobs in the current last few months in the recession. Most of the time period that the EI reform has been in place and that research has looked at has been a period of fairly stable or falling unemployment rates. But what I would say about more men losing their jobs is this. What we're concerned about is if a typical man—an auto worker, for example—who has been working full-time steadily for the last five years loses his job, he will qualify for employment insurance. That's in contrast to the more common work pattern for women, where they might have been working part-time, they might have had interrupted employment, they might have had casual work, fluctuating earnings. If they lose their job, they will be less covered, regardless of what the unemployment rate is.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** I have a question about the men and women who hold down a full-time job and have access to employment insurance. When they apply for employment insurance, does it matter whether they are a woman or a man? Is there any difference in employment insurance for women and men?

[English]

**Dr. Martha MacDonald:** This goes back to the point about comparable workers.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Right.

[English]

**Dr. Martha MacDonald:** A male and a female auto worker getting laid off with the same amount of work are going to be treated similarly. But the general point that several of us were making is that, for various reasons, the work patterns are different between men and women, and the structure of the program is more in tune with a typical male work pattern than a more typical female work pattern.

**The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson):** Thank you very much, Madame Boucher.

We'll move now to Ms. Mathyssen, please.

**Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank this panel of experts. The pieces and bits are beginning to make sense in terms of your bringing information that helps to create a narrative, I think, of what we're looking at.

I wanted to start with Madame Schirle, but I hope that other members of the panel will jump in and answer this question too.

Quite frankly, I found what you said today and in your working paper rather contradictory, that women are primarily responsible for unpaid labour and that they choose to take casual part-time work. I'm wondering about that.

I want to pick up on what Madame Zarac and what Madame Demers were talking about in terms of this word "choice", because it keeps being bandied about here, that women have choice. You said you looked at raw data, but does raw data really tell the whole story?

I'm thinking about the reality that I face in my constituency. Right now, I'm looking at people who have lost their jobs and are depending on employment insurance, and it's not there. They're devastated by this. I'm also looking at the situation of a woman, a single mom who has no access to child care. She can't go out and look for that job, because of no child care. And you made mention of the fact that we need a national child care system. We don't have one, and in point of fact the number of child care spaces has actually diminished just in the last few weeks, and we didn't have enough to begin with. What about this woman who has child care responsibilities, who is looking after a disabled or an aged family member? I think she has very, very limited choices, and the word "choices" really bothers me.

Regarding this contradiction in terms of saying we have pay equity, for example, we don't have pay equity. Manitoba has pay equity, Ontario has pay equity, Quebec has pay equity, but we do not have universal pay equity. We don't even have a federal pay equity law. The sham of a law that was perpetrated on the women of Canada three or four weeks ago is not a law.

So could somebody jump in and try to help me sort out these contradictions? I find them very, very troubling, and even worse, I see a government that relies on these contradictions to spin a tale that I can't swallow.

•(1020)

**Dr. Tammy Schirle:** Perhaps I could respond.

I think you bring up a major point: it's not clear what the objectives of the EI program are. A lot of women, yes, are working part-time because they can't find day care. Is having a national child care program supposed to be part of EI, or is that better left as a separate policy tool under a different program?

A lot of the income support programs that I think we all agree need to be there, do they actually belong under EI or should they be a part of another program?

I'm thinking of women who do choose to be working part-time. They don't expect continued employment. So thinking of employment insurance as insurance, I think it's doing a reasonable job there.

Now, if we're looking to support those women so that they have more secure income, given that they're working part-time, I'm not sure that belongs under the employment insurance program. Perhaps that's better left as a separate policy. So things like affirmative action—I grew up in a pay equity province, so I'm sorry, I tend to assume that one's there—I think are important programs for the bigger picture that we're looking at here. I'm just not sure it's part of EI.

**Mr. Ernie Lightman:** I have to budge in.

First of all, the only thing about employment insurance that is insurance is the title. It has never been an insurance program. It has never been based on insurance principles. It has always been part of the social welfare system. We judge its acceptability by how well it helps the most vulnerable in the population, and the answer is it doesn't help them very much. That's number one.

Number two, the word "choice" is a very problematic word. It's a word economists use a lot. And choice is meaningful for those who have the resources to act on their choice. Choice is a meaningful concept for middle-class families that have money and can exercise choice. You and I are both free to choose to drive a Rolls Royce, but we might have a little trouble.

There's a song, *Me and Bobby McGee*, that Janis Joplin made famous, and in that song there's a line, "Freedom's just another word for nothin' left to lose", and that's what choice means to a lot of people in this country, especially to poor, single-parent women.

• (1025)

**Dr. Martha MacDonald:** I'd like to jump in, if I may.

On the issue of choice, of course I agree with the constrained choices that people face, especially on the caregiving responsibilities. There's another aspect of the choice, which is the demand side of the labour market. Everything we've heard about choice so far is the supply side of the labour market. When I look at how the work incentives in EI get responded to, in my region it's the employers who are trying to work with the system in order to be able to find workers. It's not just a supply-side response of the individual worker.

On the issue of whether part-time should be equally protected to full-time, even if somebody chose part-time because they wanted to be home with their children, if that job then disappears in the recession, like a full-time job might disappear or a part-time job might disappear, is there any reason why that part-time person should have less likelihood of qualifying for income replacement? Granted it would be at a lower rate that reflects that they work less time, but they still can be in a position of losing a job the same as a full-time person, and the parameters of the program should not favour the person who was working in a full-time context.

**The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson):** Okay, thank you very much.

We're now going to move on to Madame Zarac, for five minutes, please.

**Mrs. Lise Zarac:** Thank you.

I think it's very important to remember the objective of unemployment insurance. It was said before that it should temporarily support the person who just lost a job. Mr. Lightman said an important thing before. He said that if a company closes in a

small town, is it pertinent to assume that the person will find a job quickly? In that objective, do you think that the EI program we have now suits the requirements of what we are facing today with the economic situation?

I'm going to give Mrs. MacDonald a chance to talk about her recommendations that she wanted to give us previously.

**Dr. Martha MacDonald:** There were two parts to the question. One related to—

**Mrs. Lise Zarac:** One was an example...

**Dr. Martha MacDonald:** —the closing of a company in a small town. We're in a particular situation with the recession, and EI is designed ideally to be able to deal with different causes of unemployment. With the recession, which is temporary, where everybody is losing jobs and it's expected to be short-run, then we need equal protection for whoever is losing their job. Also, it has to be able to respond to more structural unemployment issues. In my region the fishery is collapsing, and it's not coming back, so you can't hang out waiting for the fishery to come back; you need to pursue other options. That's more of an adjustment issue. In terms of the different types of unemployment, there are different aspects of EI that perhaps need changing.

On the adjustment issue, if you need to get trained to get out of one line of work and into another, or if you need to move to get into that kind of policy, having all those programs, all those active employment measures, tied to EI eligibility can be problematic. If you aren't still in a position to be EI-eligible, you are not going to be able to access the kinds of training and adjustment programs that might enable you to change your location or your occupation, or whatever. That's one set of issues.

The other set of issues is more in a general response to more demand if there's unemployment like we have now. Then the eligibility rules will mean that some people will qualify and some people won't. That will play through the way the hours formula plays through. It will affect how long you can collect your benefits. My comments about the benefit formula itself will affect how much of your income is replaced during that period that you're on unemployment.

• (1030)

**Mrs. Lise Zarac:** This question goes for everybody.

[*Translation*]

We know that only 48% of the population can qualify for employment insurance at present. Is that enough to support the individuals who are in need, who are looking for a job? The question is open.

**Ms. Carole Vincent:** There are various reasons why 52% of the population is not covered. As I said, some people are not insured under the employment insurance program because they did not pay into it. So it is understandable that they would not receive benefits.

Where the program is less adequate is in the case of workers, both women and men, whose association with the workforce is relatively strong except that their participation each year takes the form of a part-time job, for example. The employment insurance program recognizes the degree of association to the workforce. But, as an example, there are seasonal workers who will work two or three years and then apply for employment insurance because they have worked the requisite number of hours. They are eligible, whereas others, who have spent 20 years working on a part-time basis, and have contributed to the program for 20 years, paid the premiums every year, are not entitled to employment insurance benefits should they ever lose their job. So we have to strike a balance between recognizing the degree of association to the workforce, or certain types of degrees of association, and—

**Mrs. Lise Zarac:** The changes made could be fairer. Is that what you mean?

**Ms. Carole Vincent:** Yes. We could change the eligibility rules or perhaps—I think that Tammy said this—we should ensure that some people do not have to pay the premiums. If their workforce participation will never qualify them for benefits should they lose their jobs, perhaps they should not have to pay the premiums. Or we could do the opposite and recognize a wider variety of workforce involvement and participation.

**Mrs. Lise Zarac:** Thank you.

[English]

Do I still have time?

**The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)):** Yes, you have one minute. Actually no, you have gone over. Sorry.

Madam McLeod.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

With the passion we all bring to the subject, we often deviate from the focus of the conversation, and I do feel I need to have a quick deviation just to respond to a few things that have been said, but of course we'll ultimately focus in on what the goals are.

I think everyone here has the same goal in this country, and that is that people can be engaged in the type of work they want, regardless of gender, and that they can make choices around part-time versus full-time. I'm very proud to have a son in nursing and a daughter in business, and here we are with many women politicians. That is an important value. I don't think there is anyone who disagrees with that sort of vision and value for our country.

Where we end up with some struggles is around the best way we can get to that and perhaps what role EI plays within that. I truly do think that is a bit of an issue.

I do quickly need to suggest that we have often, within this conversation, headed into the conversation around child care, absolutely related to maternity benefits. But please, I represent a rural riding, and when we talk about universal child care as being the answer, let's not forget—I mean, I have so many people. First of all, it's a provincial responsibility. The provinces have additional money to make decisions. And I can't tell you how many people.... It might not sound like a lot of money, but the appreciation of my rural and

remote people, who have family farms and young people on family farms.... So we can't forget that we can't take an urban-centric model to our goals around early childhood development and child care.

We have this current system, and Professor Lightman, I did sort of take a little bit of objection to your comments about our government's insensitivity. This system was actually designed before our government, so to suggest that the Conservative government is responsible for a very unfair system is not quite accurate. I just want to put that on the record.

We have made a number of good changes, but we have balance, and is a government better to spend tax money creating the jobs we want people to have and stimulating the economy? The employment insurance system is supposed to be revenue-neutral. The changes we made in terms of looking at self-employed maternity benefits, in terms of five weeks, are going to cost money, and it's going to cost the people who are already working and the employers. Let's say we took all your suggestions and said yes, we want to do this for people. I don't think anyone has really looked at that bigger impact. If we are all of a sudden charging employers and employees more for something that is supposed to be neutral, I think that is going to have a huge impact. Are we going to be putting businesses out of jobs and actually losing more opportunity?

I'll just throw that open.

Thank you.

•(1035)

**Dr. Martha MacDonald:** I have just one point on revenue neutrality. EI is supposed to be an automatic stabilizer. It's supposed to be taking in more money when times are good and then paying out more money when times aren't. Over the good years since the EI reform was put in place, it built up a tremendous surplus. It's been less generous than the previous program was, and partly it was good economic times, but it has built up a huge surplus. So there is no evidence that we can't do better with the money we're already taking in. In a recession period, if the demands are higher, since we had that 13 years of surplus, that's when that kicks in.

We're not at the point where we have to be nickel-and-dime on the basic EI premiums that are being taken in. The program has room to be improved.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** Of course, unfortunately, as you are aware, prior to us, that money isn't sitting in the EI program, but we have moved it into a very independent structure.

**Mr. Ernie Lightman:** Could I comment on your child care comment? Going back to your previous comment about choice, I would just say that \$100 a month does not give a poor mother much choice around the quality of child care she can buy.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** Then again, we have to remember the transfers to the provinces that have increased each year for child care.

Mr. Baker, your specialty is maternity and paternal benefits. As you are aware, we are looking at how there could be an opportunity for the self-employed to opt in. I would appreciate understanding how you think that might work. I presume you'd be supportive of it, because it opens up benefits. But I'd like to hear some thoughts on it.

**The Chair:** Professor Baker, perhaps I can give you about 30 seconds to answer that. Ms. McLeod is over time, but I've allowed it to occur.

**Dr. Michael Baker:** The only quick thing to say is that you have to be very careful about how you structure premiums for this. It won't work as an insurance program, if you simply allow people who are self-employed to voluntarily make premium payments and to then collect benefits. What you want is everyone who is self-employed contributing the part of the premium that would cover that benefit. I know there was some discussion of this in the beginning.

There are good reasons why the self-employed initially weren't in the unemployment insurance system. Because they are in control of their own employment, there are problems of moral hazard. But in terms of maternity leave—the funny graft onto the EI program of maternity leave, which has very different goals, as has been pointed out around the table, not necessarily the ones of the regular EI system—in principle there's no reason, if the goal of this part of the program is to promote child development or these other goals, why the self-employed shouldn't share in those goals with the employed.

• (1040)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Professor Baker.

Madame Deschamps.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** Good morning to everyone. I want to tell you a secret: I am 50 today, I have lived 50 years as a woman. It is very difficult to be objective, because I get very emotional when I take stock of my life as a woman and of all that the women who have gone before me have done. I am really worried about the situation that confronts us.

In Canada, the programs, policies and measures are still very archaic and, in my opinion, very discriminatory to women. We say that we live in an evolved country. I am wondering to what extent the governments care about the welfare of women, listen to the work that we do here, to the reports that we have tabled and to all the witnesses that we meet. Studies by experts show that women are still victims of discrimination because of the government's tax system.

From the sociological perspective, we need to take a second look at the way we do things in order to rectify this injustice against women. Oh, how proud I am of being from Quebec! Quebec made choices and implemented new social programs that enabled young families to use early childhood education centres and take advantage of better parental leave than the rest of Canada. I look forward to the time when we have enough data to show that these choices have had positive results.

I come from a region that is completely losing its vitality and its young people. Will these programs bring the young people back to the region and will they encourage families to settle there? Has the parental leave program, for example, increased the birth rate? The birth rate is climbing in Quebec. Have these societal choices improved the quality of life of our families?

I apologize; we are talking about the employment insurance system at the moment. If we look at the system as it is presently, we can see that it has been distorted. We have not given any consideration to the big picture, the labour profile, which has really

changed. We no longer live in a time of job security. I am sorry to have to say this, but many people are dependent on unstable work, seasonal work. Many of these people live in the regions, but some are in the large urban centres as well. I come from a region dependent on forestry, agrifood and tourism. Most of the people there are women who depend on seasonal work. In one-industry towns—those with only one industry—the situation is even more catastrophic. In the forestry sector, most work was done by men. The only job that a woman could have—and not by choice—was in the service sector or on a part-time basis. There is a great deal of poverty and, what is even more appalling, these are skilled people and they must now rely on welfare. They are disappearing from the employment insurance statistics and the provinces are now being told that they are responsible for them and must look after them. The last and only resort is welfare. There are always employment insurance or welfare cases where people will exaggerate, but being on welfare is a hard blow to one's dignity. How can you get out if you do not have the means to do so?

We are discussing the employment insurance system. This is an insurance plan paid for by employees and employers. The government does not invest one—I feel like swearing, but I will not—cent, not one red cent, in this program.

• (1045)

But why stubbornly refuse to update it, to make it better and to consider the changes that have occurred in employment profiles? We need to update the program and tailor it to the reality that people are experiencing today in their choices and their job opportunities.

I apologize if I took up so much time.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madame Deschamps.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps:** It is my birthday, so I like me today. I am asserting myself.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Mathysen.

**Ms. Irene Mathysen:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to begin with the fact that was raised by previous witnesses in this committee, and that is that for every dollar in employment insurance, there's a generation of \$1.60 into the economy. It keeps families secure, it helps small businesses survive, and it keeps communities healthy. I think that's important.

I want to pick up on something that Professor Lightman said, that economists should know, understand, and see what social workers see; Professor Vincent, your reference to the system that is in place in Quebec; Professor Baker, your reference to breastfeeding, its benefits, and security to the mom who can stay home longer; Professor MacDonald, your reference to the stress of part-time and insecure multiple jobs.

I'm wondering about the health implications for women, their children, and their families when they're not able to access employment insurance. What price do we pay as a society when that happens?

**Mr. Ernie Lightman:** We've actually just finished doing two major studies that looked directly at that issue. We were using the Canadian community health survey, which is the largest national health survey, and we were looking at using the raw data in a secret data centre at U of T that Michael Baker is in charge of.

We were looking at the impact on a variety of health outcomes based on income level. Some of it we were able to break down by gender—some of it we weren't—and in a wide variety of health outcomes, like depression, attempted suicides, these things are far more pronounced among lower-income groups than they are among higher-income groups, and within the lower-income groups they are more pronounced among women than among men.

I didn't bring numbers because I didn't think we were going to go that route, but your hypothesis is very clearly supported by the single largest Canadian survey in the area.

**Ms. Carole Vincent:** Would you like me to speak more about the Quebec program?

**Ms. Irene Mathysen:** Yes, and its impact on positive health outcomes.

**Ms. Carole Vincent:** Well, again it's too early to know because it was just implemented in 2006. Data takes time to collect, and then it's going to take time before we know what the impact is.

But I just want to point out that this idea of paternity leave, which is accessible to the father only, we can see this as a positive thing for a man but not necessarily for a woman. I think it does promote gender equality. It's an important aspect of the program, and we see that it is being used, of course, because the financial incentive is there. The replacement rates and the maximum insurable earnings are higher. Men take advantage of it because it pays better than it would under EI, for instance.

We will see in the long run what impact it has on children's health and development and women's health. I think it's a good idea that fathers do get engaged earlier, during paternity leave, during the first year of the child's life.

There is a little evidence, as Professor Baker was saying, of the impact of this, for instance. There is some evidence suggesting that early involvement of fathers in the first year tends to increase their involvement during the rest of the child's life. This is good for parents and for women.

● (1050)

**Ms. Irene Mathysen:** How am I doing on time, Madam Chair?

**The Chair:** You have one minute.

**Ms. Irene Mathysen:** Okay. I'll try to be very quick.

In the last Parliament the committee studied the economic security of women, and we discovered that senior, single, disabled, immigrant, and first nations women are particularly vulnerable to poverty. In your academic research on employment insurance, do you look at these groups and the reasons for their poverty? Does that figure into your evaluation?

**Dr. Tammy Schirle:** I can speak to senior women, not specifically to EI, but I have been looking at the incomes of seniors and how that's changed over the past decade.

They've improved for women quite a bit over the last decade, given that the most recent cohort of women entering retirement are much more likely than their predecessors to have access to the Canada Pension Plan benefits, because they have so much more experience in the labour force than earlier generations of women.

They're also much more likely—I can't remember the numbers off the top of my head—to have a pension plan with an employer. This gives them an income that is completely independent of their spouse. So the biggest problem for women is becoming a widow. When a woman becomes a widow, she loses a lot of the family income immediately. This now becomes a situation where these women do have at least some income that is not dependent on their spouse.

I think there is some reason to actually be a bit more optimistic for senior women on that front.

**Ms. Irene Mathysen:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Davidson, please.

I'm letting everybody go over 20 minutes here in this second round, because I don't think we're going to have time for another round. So I'm cutting people some slack here.

**Mrs. Patricia Davidson:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Again, thanks very much to the presenters for being here this morning.

We've certainly heard a lot of different comments and then a lot of the same comments as well. I just want to talk a bit about the fact that several of you have talked on different levels of the EI program.

For example, Professor Lightman, you spoke a great deal about the welfare system and the integration. Several of you have spoken a great deal about whether or not the special program should be part of the overall EI program. I'm just wondering if I could hear from each of you again as we have time.

Maybe we could start with Professor Baker. How do you feel about integrating the special programs in with the regular program, in particular, with the self-employed?

**Dr. Michael Baker:** Some of the criticism of how the current maternity and parental system works is that it does tie itself to employment. As some people pointed out, it is employment of a certain type. I believe the original motivation for integrating into the EI system is that childbirth does create an earnings' interruption, and the EI system in Canada has always been based on that idea of an earnings' interruption. When you look at the broader goals of maternity and parental leave, they have a lot more to do with health and welfare and child development than they do about the more traditional goals of the EI system.

If the idea is to support parents after birth, one could imagine a system that was completely separated from the fact that someone worked or not. One could argue about why all children don't deserve some sort of support when they're born, and for that matter, why not just give a lump sum? For example, in Australia when you give birth you receive a cheque from the government. You can argue about the amount, but it's a cheque from the government and it goes to everybody.

You can view that as a maternity leave benefit that comes in one payment rather than spread out over several weeks, and it isn't conditional on whether you work. It seems a lot of the argument here is about how much you actually have to work to get this. You can work this much or that much less. Particularly if you think of this as a policy directed at child development—given that there is good research that suggests that this will have a positive effect on child development, and my personal opinion is that it's not all there yet, but suppose that it was there and that's what you wanted to do—you could see the argument for just getting this part of the program out of EI and have a separate program for the support of families that are giving birth. It's always been, I think, an uneasy graph, given the sorts of criticisms that are often made at the program. As I said, I think it had its origins in the fact that obviously giving birth creates an earnings interruption, and this program is about earnings interruptions.

• (1055)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Professor MacDonald, you have two minutes.

**Dr. Martha MacDonald:** I have thought about this question of what maternity should be within the same program, and there are some good reasons to have it outside.

On the other hand, there already are some different provisions and requirements for our parental benefits, special benefits, compared to regular ones. There's no reason that we couldn't have, within the same program, more diversity of criteria between the regular benefits and the special benefits.

**Mrs. Patricia Davidson:** Here is one other question related to that. If in fact it were outside it, how would you protect the job interruption?

**Dr. Martha MacDonald:** I was going to go on to say that I would prefer to have it kept within EI, and partly because it is a job interruption. I think we need expectations of who works and of multiple-earner families and so on as that changes; then the range of job interruptions is more than just a question of our having a recession and your losing your job. I would like a comprehensive program that takes account of different forms of interruptions, which argues for keeping it within EI.

The second reason to keep it within EI is that we're not all going to get the Quebec program, if it goes provincial. We're don't know what we'll get, and I'm quite worried about what we might get in my province. I like the idea of there being some kind of national program, but I think we have to free the logic of the program parameters for those special benefits from some of the EI logic.

**Dr. Michael Baker:** The EI program does not provide job protection; I think that's important to realize. Job protection is dependent on provincial labour standards, so “freeing the bene-

fits”—putting in a separate thing—isn't going to affect the job protection. The job protection is at the provincial level. It's part of employment standards there.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Professor Baker.

I think we've ended the rounds of debates, and I would like us to move on now.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here, for taking the time to come—in some cases on quite short notice—and for putting up with the fact that we had to cancel the very first one because of a vote.

I also would like to make a comment to everyone. I think, just on a point of respect with regard to committees and witnesses, it is important that committee members recognize that witnesses have come here because we've asked them to. If they say things we don't particularly like, we need to respect what they say without upbraiding them for what they have said or taking exception to what they say. We're here to listen. We may not always agree with what we hear, but it's supposed to be factored in.

I just wanted to set a tone here for committee meetings: that we should remember to respect our witnesses.

Thank you very much for coming. I apologize that I wasn't here for the beginning, but I want to thank Ms. Davidson for being absolutely an able chair and I wanted to thank you for coming.

There is one thing, though. I noticed that Dr. MacDonald talked about a report, and Dr. Lightman talked about some data, and some of you discussed information. We would be pleased if you would send that information along to the clerk so that we can pass it on to the committee, and the committee can therefore read it and absorb it themselves. If you think there is something you want to send to us, even if you didn't mention it here, we would appreciate any data you can send. Just please send it to the clerk.

**Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** May I ask a question on data?

**The Chair:** Yes, Ms. Neville, but we need to go—

**Hon. Anita Neville:** I just have one question: whether any of you have any information or have done research on the costs to other systems when people are under the stress of EI. I know Ms. Mathysen spoke to it, and we have seen increasing press on it now. But what are the costs to other systems? I don't know whether any of you have done any work on it, but I would certainly be interested in knowing that.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Yes, Madam Mathysen? We need to move on to—

**Ms. Irene Mathysen:** This is very quick, and it pertains to what Professor Lightman told us about what's going on at the Lord Elgin and the lock-out of women workers. It bothers me very much that we're housing our witnesses in a place that is abusing women in this way. I'm wondering whether—

**Mr. Ernie Lightman:** If I may comment, it was our choice to choose the hotel, and we didn't know. If I had known, we wouldn't have gone.

**The Chair:** This is actually not pertinent to the discussion, I believe, of EI, so I would like to move on and thank the witnesses again, so that we can move on.

This portion of the meeting is adjourned. Thank you for coming.

• \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

•  
• (1100)

**The Chair:** We have a bit of business to conduct before we meet the other witnesses. It's fairly short. It's to tidy up loose ends from business at the last meeting.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Is this for the motion?

**The Chair:** Well, we have to deal with business arising from the last meeting. So we want to tidy it up.

• (1105)

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Okay.

**The Chair:** There are some pieces of business that we had, as you will recall.

Regarding the motion from Madame Demers last week, there was a request for background information. We are not able to provide that background information today, because of translation. So this will have to come back to the next meeting, when we return just to deal with Madame Demers' motion.

I think it was Ms. McLeod who had asked for the information to be sent. Because of translation issues, we can't deal with it today. I just wanted you to know that.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Many of us who have chaired meetings in the past have dealt with *Robert's Rules of Order*. The motion to table is a *Robert's Rules of Order* motion. Here at the House of Commons, we deal with Marleau and Montpetit.

If members wish to remove a motion from the table, they can do one of two things. They can request an adjournment of debate. So let us say we were debating a motion on the table and people felt they just didn't want it; that is not debatable. If a member requests or moves a motion for ending debate, then it is not debatable. The chair immediately has to call the question on the motion on the floor.

A member could, however, as in the case of Ms. McLeod, actually put a motion forward to request adjournment to a particular date, asking for particular information for whatever reason. Now, that motion is debatable, so we can debate the motion or the feasibility of moving it forward. Then we vote on that, and if it passes, then we just get the information. If it doesn't pass, we have to get on with the debate on that motion.

Those are just the rules. I mention them just so you know them. I am used to the idea of tabling; and as soon as tabling goes on, there is no more discussion, and it moves forward. But that is in *Robert's Rules of Order*, whereas in Marleau and Montpetit, these are the rules.

Is everyone clear on that, so we can understand how we want to achieve what we want to achieve down the road?

Is it not clear, Sylvie?

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** No, it's not clear to me. I'm sorry about that.

**The Chair:** All right.

I just want to use an example. On Tuesday last week, Madame Demers had a motion on the table. We were debating it, and then Ms. McLeod requested.... No, actually, it was Madame Demers.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** I wasn't here for that. It was Ms. Mathysen's.

**Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC):** It was Pat.

**The Chair:** Oh, it was you. Sorry, Patricia.

Patricia requested a tabling of Madame Demers' motion. Of course, according to *Robert's Rules of Order*, tabling then supersedes everything; and you don't debate tabling, you just table it. But she wanted to table it for another day, based on getting information. That was fine.

However, I just wanted to tell you that tabling is not what you do under Marleau and Montpetit's rules, which we use here. Under Marleau and Montpetit, you have two choices. You can either request or move a motion to adjourn debate. If you move a motion to adjourn debate, that motion is not in itself debatable. You then have to call for the vote on the motion that was being debated, the substantive motion. Or you could move a motion to adjourn debate to another date or another time. As in Ms. Mathysen's case, she could have said we should adjourn until we get the background information from Madame Demers. That motion to adjourn debate to another time is debatable. So you debate the motion to adjourn debate to another date; and then, of course, when that comes back, you debate the motion. Okay?

I say this just so that everybody is on the same page.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Yes, we're on the same page.

**The Chair:** We're on the same page now, good. Thanks, Sylvie.

So we've dealt with that, because we do not have the information. We'll have to deal with Madame Demers' motion when we get back from our break week.

I also wanted to let you know the Deputy Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development is coming along later today.

Regarding our request for the Deputy Minister of Finance to appear, we have heard that neither the Deputy Minister of Finance nor the Minister of Finance will be able to present to this committee, because they will both be away. One, the Minister of Finance, will be away from March 31 until later today; and the Deputy Minister of Finance will be away from March 27 until May 4. So neither of them would fit into the timelines of debate. So we could not get that department to participate.

This is just housekeeping, guys. If you will recall, we had a request from a Vietnamese delegation to meet with us. That request has been cancelled by the Vietnamese delegation. But we do have a request from a delegation of eight to ten people from Serbia, who are doing a study tour aimed at strengthening the legislative-making process of their gender equality directorate. They wanted to come to Canada to hear how we go about doing that and what it is that we do. The note to meet with these particular people indicates it isn't a compulsory meeting. So you don't have to turn up, but it is really nice, and it's a courtesy when visiting delegations from other countries come to find out about our committee's work, if as many of you as possible turn up and have a discussion with them. They will be in Ottawa Tuesday, May 26. We would like to know who would like to meet with them, and we can set a place for that meeting. Just let the clerk know what you would like to do.

I also wanted to wish a very happy birthday to Madame Deschamps.

• (1110)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Yes!

[English]

**The Chair:** Yes, indeed.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** It is hard turning 50.

[English]

**Mrs. Patricia Davidson:** Madam Chair, I'm sorry, I didn't catch where you said the delegation is from.

**The Chair:** Serbia.

**Mrs. Patricia Davidson:** Okay, thank you.

**The Chair:** Unless there's any other business to deal with now... No, let's leave this until after the rest of this week, and then possibly deal with anyone who wants to bring forward notice of motions.

I will adjourn this portion and we will bring in the witnesses now.

Yes, Madame Demers.

[Translation]

**Ms. Nicole Demers:** Madam Chair, I think that Ms. Boucher has an emergency motion that she wants to present. It is quite important.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Yes, it is rather important, because we are indeed the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. I am going to read you an article, and you will see where I am going. When I read this yesterday, I was floored. I did not think that we could still

be treating women this way in 2009. As I do not come from Montreal but from an area near Quebec City, I went to see Ms. Demers about it. In translation, the title of the article is: "Female politicians outraged".

[Translation] "Terrible, terrible", said Monique Worth.

The Mayor of Pierrefonds-Roxboro is scandalized by the sign in front of Cabaret Bazaz.

"I find it terrible that, in 2009, we can still talk about women like that, still laugh at chubby or fat women."

The article says that the advertising is unfortunately vulgar. It shows women no respect. It is outside a bar where 12 dancers perform. The sign states "ten beautiful dancers, a fat one and an ugly one". We should at least respect differences. I was personally hurt because I used to be one of those women who was morbidly obese. Just 13 years ago, I weighed 305 lb. When I read the article, I felt hurt. I think that the committee should adopt a motion. I am not sure how it should be written. I do not want it to sound like a denunciation, but I would like it to say that women must be respected even in advertising. We have already talked about it here in committee. I find it deplorable that, in 2009, we can still treat women in this fashion.

I will write...

• (1115)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madame Boucher.

After we've listened to the witnesses, the committee might want to decide what to do with this—and we will have a bit of time, because I think I have notices of motion to come forward from a couple of people. I think you make a very important point, and it's extremely destructive and hurtful.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Yes.

**The Chair:** And it continues to stereotype and do all of those things.

Maybe we can decide how we want to deal with it. A motion may not be the way to go. The committee might want to put out a press release. The committee might want to do other things. But perhaps we can discuss this in further detail.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now let's move to bring in the witnesses.

The meeting is adjourned.





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