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The Honourable Hedy Fry

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• (0850)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC)): I will call the meeting to order. I know it's a few minutes late, but I think the rain has put a bit of a vehicle to our getting here.

Today, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), this is the study of the cancellation of the mandatory long-form census and its impact on women's equality in Canada. I believe this is our final session with witnesses.

I'd like to welcome Leroy Stone, who is here as an individual; the Canadian Council on Social Development, and we have Peggy Taillon and Katherine Scott; the Fédération québécoise des professeures et professeurs d'université, Françoise Naudillon, counsellor and professor, Concordia University; and the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association, and that's Doug Norris and Greg Jodouin.

We're going to give you ten minutes each for your presentations, which will be followed by a question and answer period.

At the end of today's session we'll perhaps leave ten minutes for the committee to do some wrap-up business.

So to start, Mr. Stone.

Mr. Leroy Stone (As an Individual): Thank you.

Madame Chairperson and members of the committee, it is an honour to be invited to speak to you and to make an input to your proceedings as an individual.

To begin, I'll make a few remarks about my professional background. In the mid-1990s Canada established an international lead in formally incorporating measures of unpaid work into the assessment of gender equality. I was the principal statistician behind that effort, and that effort was based on a system called the "total work accounts system", which is based upon time-use data.

Later on, after three questions concerning unpaid work were inserted into the census, I was the co-author of a small book entitled *The 1996 Census: Unpaid Work Data Evaluation Study*, published by Status of Women Canada.

Finally, it is relevant to note that I have served brief terms as the president of the Canadian Population Society and as a member of the board of directors of the Population Association of America. These are organizations of social scientists specializing in demography and related aspects of non-partisan data development and data analysis.

You have already heard some excellent testimony, and your members have raised interesting questions. Your past hearings form part of the context for what I will now say.

In trying to provide a helpful contribution to your proceedings, I have kept two general questions in mind. First, to what extent does the change in the design for gathering data in the census put at risk the quality and/or quantity of support provided by statistical data or by data analysis for programs and policies that bear upon gender equality? Second, what are the consequences of having no questions on unpaid work in the new national household survey?

As you're all aware, these questions lead to complex discussions. There is consensus on some points of knowledge and there is also a great deal of speculation around other issues, because the information required to resolve those issues will come in the future. I hope what I say will be a small contribution to the points of generally accepted knowledge and to those speculations that are fruitful from a scientific discussion context.

With regard to the impact of the design change on questions that have been approved for inclusion in the census or in the new national household survey, there appears to be a consensus on two important points.

First, there is almost certain to be an impact, for reasons already explained to the committee by experts in assessing the quality of census data.

Secondly, we have little idea at this time concerning the extent of the impact. On this point there needs to be some concentrated thinking about the particular census or national survey variables, which are especially important in the assessment of data on gender equality.

Census variables that have been repeatedly used among indicators of gender equality include income, education, labour force participation, class of worker, and occupation. In order to interpret variations in gender equality values based on those variables, it is essential, within our national context, to also take into account variables such as language, various dimensions of ethnic origin, place of birth, aspects of family and household status, and age.

When I was a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, which at that time was one of the leading population studies centres, and later when I was a professor in the University of Michigan, we had many discussions about census data. During that time it was understood that there are some variables within the census that are measured with very good quality, others with consistently poor quality, and others with quality in between. Now, I would imagine that in 2011 that kind of knowledge will be much more advanced than it was when I was a student.

So we already have good grounds for sensing where we ought to look for strange data patterns in measuring changes over time between earlier censuses and that of 2011.

Unfortunately, this knowledge will not take us very far. As you have already heard from the experts on data quality, if we are in the presence of strange data patterns, without access to independent sources of information we probably would not be able to assess the extent to which those patterns are affected by changes in the design for gathering the data; hence those leaders in any sector with projects based on data that are thought to be reliable and who learn that the available data patterns are of highly doubtful validity will be required to bring new financial and professional resources to the table in the search for independent data. I am speaking about new resources that would need to be brought on stream after Statistics Canada has delivered the data.

Within any of the relevant sectors of our society, the harnessing of professional and financial resources to search for independent data could be a major new product that has to be put on their books at the expense of other uses of those same resources. The projects could be so large that a consortium of sponsors might be required to get it started.

Now, I wish to emphasize that what I have just said deals only with the context in which an important stakeholder learns that the available data patterns are of highly doubtful quality. There is a strong consensus that for many uses, strange data patterns will not be found. Only the future will tell the relative frequency of good and bad situations concerning these data patterns.

In this connection, we should note that many users troubled by what they feel are serious defects in data delivered to them by Statistics Canada will turn to Statistics Canada for help. Experts in data analysis who are well grounded in such subject matters as income are the key Statistics Canada resources to provide that help to those users. Are sufficient professional resources to respond to users who need help going to be available from Statistics Canada as we go forward?

What are the consequences of a new national survey in which the former census questions about unpaid work are absent? I wish to make three points in connection with this debate.

Please study the central conclusions of the book I cited earlier. There you will learn that when unpaid work questions were inserted into the census, the authors did not think it possible or even advisable to try to estimate the total volume of unpaid work using census questions, and this for two reasons.

First, significant elements of unpaid work are not covered, such as volunteering for organizations or unpaid inputs to a family business.

Second, the kinds of questions used in the census risk double counting of time between at least two of the activities in question 33. So these activities need to be treated separately when you are using the census data.

In inserting those items into the census, the idea was that communities concerned with services pertaining to child care or pertaining to elder care could turn to Statistics Canada for assistance in connection with background data. When I speak of concerned communities, I would like you to think of the mayor of Kamloops in British Columbia. As Dr. Fellegi has already pointed out, the role of the census in these areas was to provide complementary data. I repeat for emphasis that what we are thinking about are such specific services as child care and elder care, and not the overall volume of unpaid work.

The second point I would like to make in connection with this debate concerning the time-use data is that where these data count only the primary activity undertaken within a given time slot by a respondent, the census question on child care provides better data about the amount of time being spent on child care. You will find evidence for that in my book. However, on listening to the hearings of the 16th, I learned that the latest time-use survey has arrangements to better record activities in situations in which people are doing more than one thing at the same time. This will be an important improvement in the time-use data.

● (0855)

My last point in connection with the debate is to plead with you to reflect upon a process in which the debate is resolved by thinking only about the needs of the federal government departments and what Statistics Canada may or may not be able to do to meet those particular needs.

Traditionally, work done at Statistics Canada has had to be sensitive to at least the following three classes of stakeholders: one, the designer of a marketing or product innovation program in the business sector; two, the non-profit organization leader developing a program of assistance to specific population groups; and three, a government policy or program leader needing to fine-tune a municipal, provincial, or federal policy program to address the situations of particular subgroups of men and women in our society.

Sensitivity to the widely varying data needs of these three classes of stakeholders was explained on the grounds that Statistics Canada was a national resource when viewed from the perspective of society as a whole. At the same time, we all need to be conscious of the fact that this agency is now subject to constraints that are affecting its ability to be adequately helpful across the range of sectors that I've just identified. Some of these constraints are demographic; I'm referring, of course, to the wave of baby boomer retirements.

Thank you for your attention. I would be happy to try to respond to your questions as an individual.

● (0900)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Thank you, Mr. Stone.

We next have the Canadian Council on Social Development.

Ms. Taillon, are you going to be doing the presentation?

Ms. Peggy Taillon (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Council on Social Development): Yes, thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Okay. At about nine minutes I'll try to gesture so that you can wrap things up.

Ms. Peggy Taillon: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you all. It's a pleasure to be here today.

I'm here along with Katherine Scott, our vice-president of research, who's also been appointed director of programs at the Vanier Institute.

As you all likely know, CCSD is Canada's longest-established social policy organization. We were founded in 1920 by Charlotte Whitton. We have a long history of working collaboratively with successive Canadian governments. CCSD developed the concepts of some of our most fundamental social programs in the country, including EI, disability, and old age pension, at a time when Canadians needed it most.

One of our flagship programs is called the community social data strategy. This is a pan-Canadian partnership where members collectively purchase about \$900,000 worth of census data at a discounted rate. Consortium members include police services, municipalities, United Ways, provincial government departments, and front-line service agencies, just to name a few.

Our partners use the data to respond to troubling trends in their local communities. The information allows communities to focus their efforts at the neighbourhood level, making better use of our tax dollars and targeting services that respond to those most in need. Yes, we're talking about \$1 million worth of revenue for the government, and now we're at a point where we have to determine whether or not we would purchase it at all.

As we've said many times since the decision was taken, losing the long-form census is equal to the government turning off Canada's navigation system. Those in government who support this decision must consider the impact of this decision very carefully. For over five months now, Canadians certainly have, and their response has been unequivocal. Over 370 organizations have come forward in opposition to this decision. They represent every aspect of Canadian life. Hundreds of others have spoken out more quietly, as they fear there could be repercussions for their organizations if they were more public in their criticism. Over 17,000 Canadians have petitioned for a reversal of the decision; 11,000 more have joined a Facebook page.

As we all know, Canada's chief statistician resigned in protest. Opposition parties have been unanimous and vocal in their condemnation, and challenges have been launched in the Federal Court. Tens of thousands of ordinary Canadians have written and called and visited their MPs to voice their concerns. Polling on this

decision has been quite consistent as well, showing 60% of Canadians want the decision reversed.

For so many, it is inconceivable that our government would choose to navigate the country's current and future direction without the most comprehensive source of information that is universally relied on as a tool to respond to the needs and priorities of every Canadian, doing so against the advice of experts across the country.

And the experts have been clear: a voluntary survey will underrepresent significant communities, such as aboriginal Canadians, Canadians living with disabilities, and visible minorities. A voluntary survey will underrepresent the numbers and skew the service needs of marginalized communities across this country. This under-counting will be most evident at the local neighbourhood level, rendering this data virtually unusable for local service planning and depriving the under-counted of the services to which they're entitled. In essence, we will look whiter, more middle class, and in need of less government support.

Despite the government's contention that it is too late to reverse this decision, we know it is not. A simple cover letter from the chief statistician, our Prime Minister, placed on every national household survey could make it mandatory: yes, a note could make this all go away. Until the surveys reach our mail boxes, there's an opportunity to restore the long form.

If the logistics of implementing a reversal requires time for StatsCan, there is no magic in a spring census. As Ivan Fellegi has said, move the census to the fall. The most important thing here is to get it right. Why pay more and get less?

This is worth fighting for, and we're pursuing every possible option to have this decision reversed. CCSD, along with 12 other organizations in the country, have launched a legal challenge in the Federal Court defending Canadians' equal right to be counted. Partners in our challenge include the Canadian Arab Federation, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians, the Canadian Mental Health Association, and many others.

● (0905)

You need not look far to determine where these data are used. Each and every one of us in this room today has likely used and most certainly has benefited from this information.

Let's be honest: this is an experiment, and a costly one. Statistics Canada itself has said that it has never conducted a survey of this scale, nor does it know if the country has anything in place to actually mitigate the unanticipated negative impacts. One thing it does know is that there will be a significant non-response bias—that is, people who don't respond tend to have characteristics different from those who do. StatsCan says that the voluntary survey will just not be representative of all Canadians.

The moral, legal, and economic dimensions of this decision just don't add up. We're selling our children's future, weakening evidence that will direct how and where tax dollars are spent, and further weakening our social infrastructure at a time when we all know we need it the most—and we're doing so by discriminating against some of the most vulnerable groups in this country.

I'm now going to turn it over to Katherine Scott, if time allows, to provide some additional opening comments.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): You have three and a half minutes left.

Ms. Katherine Scott (Vice-President, Research, Canadian Council on Social Development): Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee.

Cutting to the chase, I want to come back and follow up on Peggy's comments in terms of recommendations, taking into account the fact that the committee is looking at the mandatory nature of the long-form census and questions around unpaid work.

We would urge the committee to use its powers to ensure that the mandatory long form is included in the 2011 census, as Peggy has outlined. As well, we'd like to put on record that we support the recommendations that the National Statistics Council has forwarded to this government in respect of the census and Statistics Canada. As well, we would like to register our support for the proposed amendments to the Statistics Act that would ensure the integrity of Statistics Canada and its autonomy to pursue the highest-quality data collection possible. We would like as well to support the letter that was forwarded earlier by the chief statistician, the former governor of the Bank of Canada, and two former clerks of the Privy Council.

It's not an exaggeration to say that the census is the foundation of our data collection systems in Canada. The decision to abandon the long-form census will certainly critically undermine the integrity of our census, but as well it will undermine the integrity of many other surveys and data collections in Canada. It will compromise the ability of governments at all levels to pursue evidence-based decision-making and informed policy and program choices, most especially at the community level.

I'm coming today as a researcher. I can touch briefly on some of the work we've done at CCSD in Vanier and about how we have used the census in our own work, but I actually wanted to bring forward a more personal anecdote. I've been doing research in the community sector for upwards of 20 years, and I really truly cannot tell you the number of times I get phone calls from people across the country—from Kamloops, as Leroy was saying—with simple questions, asking me, for example, how many single moms live in Campbell River, British Columbia, or what types of supports are available in the communities. People in this age are wont to pick up the phone, and I turn to the census. This is really, exclusively, the only source of information at the community level. This decision in particular will have an extraordinary impact on the availability and quality of data available to communities across the country.

In the absence of the census in the long form, where will communities turn in the future to answer these questions? Will they have the expertise or resources to pursue this information to help plan their services and the like? Will they have the ability to collect

these data themselves? I would put forward to you that they will have neither the resources nor the funds to pursue this important information and that they will go without. Many communities will be steering, as Peggy has said, without any type of navigation tool.

In some of the research we've done, the census has been critical for us at CCSD in pursuing studies of urban poverty. I can cite the research. For instance, some of you may be familiar with "Poverty by Postal Code". That report was done in Toronto back in 2004. That particular piece of research identified emerging patterns of urban poverty in Toronto, and that led directly to the United Way's profoundly changing their programming and setting up neighbourhood revitalization programs that are influencing policy today.

To wrap up, I would say that just as we have, over this past number of months, invested in our critical physical infrastructure, it's as critical to invest in our knowledge infrastructure. In that regard, the census is a foundation, and I urge the committee to lend its weight and its voice to maintaining the long-form census.

• (0910)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Thank you.

Next we have Ms. Naudillon.

[Translation]

Dr. Françoise Naudillon (Counsellor, Professor, Concordia University, Fédération québécoise des professeurs et professeurs d'université): Good morning. I am Françoise Naudillon from FQPPU. Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee, for giving us the opportunity to share our point of view on the cancellation of the mandatory long-form census.

Very early on, the Fédération des professeurs et professeurs du Québec was opposed to the cancellation of the mandatory long-form census, as were many other Quebec organizations that have either a broad or specific interest in the status of women. I refer, for example, to the Conseil du statut de la femme, the Fédération des femmes du Québec, the Comité des femmes des communautés culturelles and Action travail des femmes. Among the more specific organizations, we can name the Institut de la statistique du Québec, the Centre interuniversitaire québécois de statistiques sociales, and so on. I would also like to mention that there is the Quebec coalition for the future of the census, which brings together a number of these organizations.

I would like to point out, like the previous group did, that there are about 75 university research projects in Quebec that use the statistics from the census. A number of these projects deal with women and the status of women.

I will only give you one concrete example of the type of very important information that we need and that is available through these statistics. The document *Portrait des Québécoises en 8 temps*, for example, was published this year by the Conseil du statut de la femme based on data collected in the 2006 census. This paints a portrait of the status of women in eight areas of their lives: demographics, education, family, work, income, health, leisure activities, and, finally, employment and power.

The survey says the following:

Women are more numerous in the classroom, even far more numerous than men, and they perform very well in school. But, in terms of employment, the picture darkens: women are concentrated in a limited number of low paying professions and their income is lower than that of men. Even though men are doing more of the housework, women are still responsible for a significant portion of the work. Single parent families are still mostly run by women. Too many women continue to be victims of domestic violence. While their representation in positions of power has increased considerably, parity is still far off.

So it is not by chance that university researchers, professors and students in humanities, social sciences and health sciences are at the forefront of this debate on the future of the mandatory long-form census. We need to remember that the current government's decision is putting an end to a 35-year-old tradition and that we have conducted surveys in Canada since 1852. We all know—and we even heard it once here—that statistical research has to be traced through time.

Women in particular would have everything to lose if the mandatory long-form census, as conducted until 2006, was cancelled. Cancelling the form opens a giant gap in the Canadian heritage of statistics, and the coherence, reliability and comparability of data will be lost. It is actually due to the production and systematic analysis of gender-based data that it was possible to implement programs to fight gender stereotypes and inequality between men and women.

If the decision is maintained, how will we be able to know the following, as indicated on the Statistics Canada site on September 10, 2007:

Immigrant women in the core-working-age group of 25 to 54 had higher unemployment rates and lower employment rates than both immigrant men and Canadian-born women, regardless of how long they had been in Canada.

If we continue along the same lines, how will we be able to have access to analyses such as the one entitled *Les effets des accords de commerce et de la libéralisation des marchés sur les conditions de travail et de vie des femmes au Québec, 1989-2005*, which was published in the 23rd issue of Cahiers de l'IREF? How will we assess women's entrepreneurship?

How will we be able to look at “the heterogeneity of socio-economic status and experiences of women and the diversity of identities, practices and positions at a local, national and international level”? This question was raised by Francine Descarries, a professor of Sociology at UQAM.

• (0915)

In other words, it is by comparing data over time that the programs implemented to address inequalities can be assessed, changed or improved. University research will make it possible to refine both the chronological process, meaning traced over time, and the instant process, since these studies also have to do with the study

of sub-populations and microdata. Researchers who work with detailed analyses can address the inequality between men and women, the issue of immigrant women, single mothers or issues like prostitution, sex work, parity, economic recognition of caregiving, new reproductive technologies, same-sex parenting, and so on. These are core issues that affect not only the development of the status of women, but also of society as a whole.

However, it is known that any statistical survey must set a reference point, for itself, ideally every five years, to establish its validity and reliability. It really is about comparing the past to the present in order to build our future. By dropping the mandatory long-form census, we condemn ourselves to the production of phantom data and make a dangerous bet on the future. In addition, as mentioned earlier, it is precisely those marginalized and vulnerable groups of people who, as we know, will provide very low response rates when it comes to voluntary polls, as proposed for the national household survey.

So the future of large sections of Canadian research is at stake. Eliminating the mandatory long-form census will not only diminish the quality of the results, but will also increase the costs of information because polls or surveys administered by private organizations will have to be used, and, as a result, the privatization of this acquired knowledge will be looming over our heads.

I would like to conclude by talking about the already significant consequences of the government's announcement at the international level.

In June, when the elimination of the mandatory long-form census was announced, a real earthquake hit. For example, we can see the condemnation of this decision by Kenneth Prewitt from Columbia University, former director of the U.S. Census Bureau, in the August 26, 2010 issue of *Nature*.

Robert McCaa is the director of IPUMS-International, a database quoted as a reference by all researchers around the world who use statistics. When the cancellation of the mandatory long-form census was announced, he said that the 2011 data that would be collected in the current form of the Canadian census could no longer be included in this international database. I must point out that the database has collected data from 55 countries around the world since 1960. Canadian data will no longer be included because it will be impossible to harmonize and compare them with those of other countries.

As an aside, I would just like to mention that the infamous question that had been considered intrusive, the question on the number of rooms in the house is asked in 20 of those countries that are part of this international database. This question makes it possible to understand the living conditions of children, for example, and their mothers.

The international demographic database, as indicated by Lisa Dillon, professor of demography at the University of Montreal, “allows us to measure the wage gap between men and women and see how great it is from one country to another”. What I want to emphasize here is that the elimination of the mandatory long-form census has consequences for Canada and its communications outside the country.

I would like to conclude by saying that, in this debate, it might be worth mentioning the well-known Japanese parable of the wise monkeys. To avoid misfortune and spreading it, one must see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil. However, we must not forget the yin and yang side of the story, which says that pretending to see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil is harmful behaviour.

● (0920)

Cancelling the mandatory long-form census will condemn women to see, hear and say nothing about themselves.

Thank you.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Thank you.

We'll go to our final witness. That is Mr. Norris, who is from the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association.

Mr. Doug Norris (Representative, Senior Vice-President and Chief Demographer, Environics Analytics, Marketing Research and Intelligence Association): Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee. I want to thank you, first of all, for inviting our association to appear before you today on this very important issue. Many of our members feel quite strongly and are quite concerned about what this means in terms of their future business practices.

My name is Dr. Doug Norris and I am currently senior vice-president and chief demographer for Environics Analytics. In that capacity, I work with many large businesses, small businesses, non-profit organizations, and governments at all levels in using the census information and other information to help them make their business decisions.

Previously I spent 30 years at Statistics Canada, most recently as director general of social and demographic statistics. While there, I was a member of the senior census management team. However, today I am here as a representative of the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association—I'll refer to it as MRIA. With me is my colleague, Greg Jodouin, who is our organization's government relations consultant.

MRIA is the single authoritative voice of the market and survey research industry in Canada. Our membership includes over 2,000 individual research practitioners and more than 400 corporate members—large businesses, small businesses of all types—who are users of research information. MRIA is tasked with developing and enforcing the standards for the Canadian opinion research industry. Overall, we account for about three quarters of a billion dollars a year in economic activity in Canada.

Our association considers the issue of the mandatory long-form census to be of prime importance. We have written to the minister on this issue, and I believe a copy of our letter to him will be circulated to committee members. We'll also be making available a copy of the brief here today.

Our basic concern is that the cancellation of the mandatory long-form census will affect the availability of data, the quality of data, and the reliability of data—all that is considered essential to Canadian businesses and many other organizations in trying to navigate through what is becoming a very complex economy and

complex and rapidly changing society. We have the baby boomers aging, we have high levels of immigration, immigrants struggling in many cases to adapt to Canadian society, our aboriginal population becoming an important part of our future labour market. All of these issues are being faced by businesses trying to sort this out and depending for that purpose on census information.

Although the new voluntary national household survey will come into play and may provide good data for some purposes, it is not expected to be able to provide reliable information for many purposes. I think you've heard from many commentators on that issue. In particular, the concern with the loss of the mandatory census is the loss of our ability to track change over time. It's often the trends that are important rather than a level of something—which is, however, of interest. It's the question of whether things are improving or deteriorating. Do we need a new program put in place? Do we have to modify a program? It's those trends, and also the data on small population groups and small geographic areas.

Our businesses operate in different parts of Canada, in rural Canada, in urban Canada, and in big parts of the large CMAs. Toronto is by no means homogeneous; Ottawa is not homogeneous. Our businesses need to understand the local population around, for example, a store or other operation that they engage in. That population is changing as well. It's the loss of both the trend information and this small-area and small-population-group information that's of real concern to our members.

As many others have pointed out and as you've heard this morning, the response rate in a voluntary survey will likely be substantially lower than average for hard-to-reach segments of the population: low-income groups, marginalized communities such as the aboriginal population, immigrants. Also, high-income households will probably be hard to reach. The new national household survey is therefore likely to lead to skewed data. This will give rise to doubts about the accuracy.

Unfortunately, we just won't know which of the data is accurate—some of it will be—and which is not, so there will be concerns raised about all of the census information. Large sample sizes, although the national household survey is larger than the last census, don't address the issue of bias and skewness.

Although the census decision will impact on many aspects of our work, I'd like to give you a few examples of the negative impact on our association members' ability to measure and monitor trends and plan targeted programs related to women's equality.

● (0925)

Many businesses have particular programs targeted at the recruitment, retention, and promotion of women. In looking at those programs, they rely on census data as a benchmark, as a comparator, to see how well they're doing. For example, they may compare their own workforce profile to the profile of the local labour market outside: how do they compare, and are things improving? Are they moving in the right direction? Do we need to modify our programs or introduce new programs?

More generally, relevant comparisons of male/female income differences, an important indicator of gender equality, really require very detailed data by age, education, specific occupations, class of worker. Only a census can provide this information. It's important again to do these comparisons at a local level: the labour market in Toronto is not the same as the labour market in northern Alberta, for example.

From the survey industry's perspective, another important concern is the loss of the long-form census as a benchmark for the many surveys our members carry out. Survey researchers rely on the census data—and refer to it as the gold standard of surveys—in order to monitor their own surveys and adjust their surveys to be representative of the population as they see it in the census. We cannot stress strongly enough that without the data from the long-form census, without the “gold standard” to refer to, all survey results, including those from the national household survey, will likely be biased to some extent, particularly on important dimensions such as income, education, housing, and many other characteristics.

Corporate and government decision-makers rely on accurate and reliable research data to help them make the right decisions and to navigate through our complex society. Measuring the trends and conditions of women and other population groups will be more important than ever as we come out of this post-recession and our economy develops. There will be a lot of interest in how well various groups are doing as we emerge from the recession. How well will our labour market be responding to the many changes we see around us?

In the future, the lack of reliable information may in fact result in poorer decisions, lower business efficiencies, and likely increased costs for businesses as they go out and search for other information to replace what the census can't provide. I'd suggest that overall, productivity and our competitiveness may in fact be affected by the loss of this very valuable navigation tool.

We therefore urge the committee to recommend that cabinet reconsider and reverse its decision to eliminate the mandatory long-form census.

I think I'll leave it there. I look forward to your questions. Thank you again for asking us to appear.

● (0930)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Thank you very much.

We will now head into our question and answer period. For those who haven't been to a committee before, each group takes turns, and the first round is seven minutes for questions and answers for each member.

We'll start with Ms. Neville.

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

Thank you all very much for being here this morning. We've certainly heard opinions from a varied group of presenters, and we welcome you.

My first question is for Mr. Stone. In your opening statement you referred to your work in preparing three technical papers published

in *The 1996 Census: Unpaid Work Data Evaluation Study*, which you co-authored with a colleague—I think it was Sandra Swain. My understanding is that the stated purpose of this study was to evaluate whether the census data on unpaid work is valid data and how the census data compares with the GSS time diary data on unpaid work of various kinds.

I hope you'll correct me if I'm wrong, and I'm not going to go into reading it all, but it appears that the study reached two conclusions of interest to the committee. You said:

With its large sample size, census estimates will be more reliable than the GSS in terms of sampling variability for dozens of significant sub-populations.

You went on to say, further on, that:

...with regard to child-caring work, it is almost totally misleading to suggest that the GSS time-diary estimates of time spent doing child caring *as a primary activity* are comparable (let alone superior) to the census-type, stylized question....

You go on, but I don't want to take the time to read it all.

Is it your professional opinion that these findings are still valid; that you're not aware of any studies that would show that those findings, albeit 15 years ago, are incorrect?

Mr. Leroy Stone: I would certainly stand by them, with the proviso that we take note of the fact that Statistics Canada is making an effort to deal with the key problem in the time-use survey. In the latest cycle of the survey, they are now trying to handle multi-tasking—for example, women ironing and keeping an eye on the kid at the same time—so there is improvement in the last round of the time-use survey on this issue. At the time we wrote it, it did have that rather important problem.

Hon. Anita Neville: You say there is improvement. Is it sufficient to meet the requirements of providing accurate information?

Mr. Leroy Stone: At the national level I would say that it almost certainly is, but notice that I emphasized the case of the mayor of Kamloops, for whom the GSS is of no use.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

My question is to whoever wants to answer. Is there any jurisdiction worldwide that does not have some kind of mandatory collection of additional demographic data of the kind that existed in the previous mandatory Canada long-form census? We all know about the Finland cards, but apart from that, is there any jurisdiction?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Is anyone able to tackle that question?

Mr. Doug Norris: I'm not aware of any country that carries out a census on a voluntary basis. There are countries that do not carry out a census and collect that information through other means, generally through some kind of registration system, but that system is mandatory in itself, and people have to report that information. I can't say I've canvassed the world, but I'm not aware of countries that do not carry out a mandatory census.

The U.S. actually moved to a new method of data collection. They do a survey, but that survey, since it replaced the census, is actually mandatory as well.

• (0935)

Hon. Anita Neville: Is there anybody else?

What has struck me, listening to those who are here today and to the representations last week, is the real frontal assault on women's equality through the cancellation of the mandatory long-form census and the removal of question 33, and the fact that this assault has not been articulated in the public domain.

Do any of you want to comment on that, and would you agree with my observation?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Go ahead, Ms. Scott.

Ms. Katherine Scott: When this issue first came up and when I looked at and read the new household survey, I was certainly struck by the fact that those particular questions on unpaid work had been excised from the household survey.

It brought to mind the real fight there had been in the women's movement back in the 1960s and 1970s—and indeed stretching back to the time when Charlotte Whitton was president of CCSD, back in the 1920s—around the number of women engaged in trying to elevate the importance of unpaid work. Those groups ranged across the ideological spectrum. They were people who were concerned about the labour market, but concerned also about unpaid caring work that women were doing. Certainly the fight for the inclusion of these questions in the census had everything to do with understanding women's equality and making the case that women who were labouring in the home were doing incredibly important caregiving work that was not being captured in our formal economic accounts. We can document that history with the national accounts and the work of Marilyn Waring in *If Women Counted*.

How quietly this happened. This one set of questions, without consultation, was excised from the 2011 census. I have been struck by the silence, because it really does strike profoundly at questions of women's equality.

While there are now new data collection instruments and surveys, such as the GSS, that look at care and elder care and child care, they don't facilitate the ability to do the kind of far-reaching analysis around gender equality that Leroy and Doug were talking about that you are able to do with the census.

You're absolutely correct that this has been quite striking, and the silence has been profound.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): We thank you.

We'll go on to Monsieur Desnoyers.

[Translation]

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

Welcome, everyone.

For a few days now, we have been receiving dozens of people to discuss the long-form census that allows us to collect important data. This form is for 2.9 million people, compared to the survey that is

sent to 25,000 people. The cost of the survey would be \$30 million higher than that of the long form. We are trying to understand this process. Yet we know that we are losing important data.

Ms. Naudillon, you were first to be asked questions. You often talked about comparability, both at a local level and at a marketing level. My questions are for all of you. You can all answer, including Ms. Taillon.

The loss of data will be significant at a municipal, provincial, federal and even international level. Ms. Naudillon, you mentioned that this was being done in a number of countries around the world, even though it was not included in any agreements. We are comparing our methods to be able to move forward with the work on women issues. As a committee, we are trying to get this work done. We are aware that women have been working for a long time to add questions to the long-form census. These questions are going to disappear and women will be silenced.

My colleague Nicole Demers told us that, unfortunately, on March 6, women were told to keep their mouths shut because they were taking up too much space. Personally, I simply say that you are taking up space, because the space belongs to you.

I would like to hear what you have to say about the reliability and quality of data, comparability and the future losses from not having these data.

Ms. Naudillon, you can go first and then it will be Ms. Taillon's turn, followed by Mr. Norris.

• (0940)

Dr. Françoise Naudillon: Thank you for your question.

Academics and researchers who work with microdata must be able to compare them to be sure that what they are saying is accurate. They have to be able to compare data not only at a local and national level, but also at an international level.

I will tell you a quick story that we heard while we were discussing the international consequences of abandoning the mandatory long form. Mali, one of the poorest countries in the world, and which is, off the top of my head, the 135th country based on the human development index, did everything in its power, stormed all the printing firms in the country, to produce a long-form census in order to collect the maximum amount of data. Among other things, these data dealt with the issue of women and the work of women. In other words, it is very important for a country like Mali to get all the possible gender-based data. Yet, a country like Canada, which is 5th on the human development index list, does not even bother to collect data systematically.

I happen to participate in the infamous sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which take place every year. So I can tell you that, in 2008, the main issue was decent work for women and recognizing their work at home, including the care given to the elderly. In broader terms, meaning at international level, we also addressed the fact that, generally speaking, women feed the planet.

Canada's decision to eliminate this type of questionnaire affects the availability of information about ourselves. It is also sets a bad example for the other countries that are trying to raise their own standards. That is why it is very dangerous. To improve the situation in Mali, they will look at what works best for women in developed countries. But barriers are appearing and steps are disappearing.

That's what is happening internationally. I will stop there.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: What do you think, Ms. Taillon?

[English]

Ms. Peggy Taillon: At a time when we know we've got this sandwich generation, we have a crisis emerging in the country around caregiving. There's a generation that has young children and is very much concerned about taking care of their aging parents. We know this is a fundamental issue. It's only going to grow as our boomers age. To remove the questions related to unpaid work from the national household survey is really problematic. We need that data more than we've ever needed it. It's almost a backward slide.

On the issue of questions, one of the things that's really striking is we did a comparative analysis between the long form and the national household survey. You'd be surprised to note these are really the only questions that are absent. We know that because of the francophone injunction three additional questions were added to the short forms, so now there are eleven questions there. If you do a comparative analysis between the two, the surveys haven't changed.

Clearly the questions really weren't a problem for cabinet, because cabinet decides what the questions are, except for the unpaid work questions. To me, that's a fundamental issue and a fundamental question for Canadians and Canadian women.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: And you, Mr. Norris?

[English]

Mr. Doug Norris: I would make a couple of points on surveys.

Surveys are very important as part of the overall information system and provide us with accurate data. Again, surveys depend on the census in order to make sure they're accurate. However, surveys can't provide data for small areas. For example, a survey won't provide data for your constituencies. You need something like a census, which profiles your constituencies once every five years in much detail. Or a survey won't provide data for small groups, particularly in small areas. So surveys and a census are certainly complementary, but they do not replace one another.

● (0945)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): You have 20 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: You all said that the information gathered would be skewed and that you would be spending more time questioning the results of the data than moving ahead with the programs. I felt there was unanimity on this. Am I mistaken?

Since I only have 20 seconds, you are all nodding "yes".

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Thank you.

We'll go on to Ms. Brown, please.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you all very much for being here this morning and for your participation in this discussion.

First of all, here is a quick question for the Canadian Council on Social Development. Can you tell me who funds your organization?

Ms. Peggy Taillon: We are funded by members and private foundations, private donors.

Ms. Lois Brown: Could you give us some examples of some of those members?

Ms. Peggy Taillon: The Donner Foundation is a funder. We have funding from the Muttart Foundation. We have thousands of individual and organizational members who fund CCSD.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you very much.

I have just a comment for Madame Naudillon. The number of households that are single-parent households headed by women is I think something that's very apparent; I don't think it would be any surprise to any of us, since courts for the last 30 years have been making those decisions. It is something that I think all of us—certainly any of us who are involved in elected positions or have worked in any social agencies—have known, that the decisions of the court for the last 30 years have been pointing in that direction.

I guess my real questions are for Mr. Norris, if we don't mind. Could you talk to us about the surveys that you use now? I've been the recipient of phone calls from Environics on a regular basis. Could you give us a little description of how you make the decisions on where you're going to target those surveys?

Mr. Doug Norris: Most of our surveys are client-driven; that is, a client will come to us with a certain problem. They may, for example, be an American company wanting to relocate into Canada and wanting to know about the population in two or three possible sites that they may be looking at. They will ask us to undertake a survey of the area, asking questions perhaps related to the interest in the kinds of products and services that company is offering.

Ms. Lois Brown: Fundamentally what you're looking for, when a client of yours is looking to relocate or looking to promote a product, is to find out basically what kind of disposable income might be available for a certain product. Would that be accurate?

Mr. Doug Norris: Well, income is certainly one factor, but it goes way beyond income. What's important is, for example, the changing ethnic mix of our population. People from different backgrounds may have different preferences in their consumer behaviour. They may have different types of families, different types of households. So the interest is in the wide range of what we call socio-economic data.

Ms. Lois Brown: Sure. So when you talk about male/female income data, you're really looking at targeting a product to a certain market. I've been in business and I certainly know about target marketing because of the service that my business provided. That's really what you're looking for.

Mr. Doug Norris: Well, no, the reference I made to male/female differences was more in the context of human resource planning. Businesses are in the business of hiring, of promoting women, of retaining women in their workforce. It's very competitive, so they're interested in whether their business represents the face of the community they're serving. To what extent is it true, and do they have to monitor it? Do they want to introduce new programs, introduce new recruitment strategies? As I say, it is a very competitive recruitment environment they're in, and becoming more and more so.

So my reference to the male/female earnings difference was really made on the human resources side of things. But you're right. Certainly marketing to women is an important factor as well.

Ms. Lois Brown: I just have a comment, if I may, from my own constituency of Newmarket—Aurora.

When I look at the changes that have happened in my riding in even the last five years, quite frankly, I believe that the survey data people are using are not providing them with the information they need. I say this because I am very intent on seeing post-secondary education come to my riding, and I know it's a provincial issue, but I'm trying to build the foundations necessary to support it. But my hospital has had, for the last 10 years, a collection area for services of nearly 200,000 people, and, quite frankly, the surveys have missed the mark for providing the services that need to go along with all of that. So if there's anything Environics can do to support a survey collection of data....

I brought all of this material with me, because it's material that I regularly get at my door from any variety of marketers who are looking to sell products. I guess my question to you is, do you think people should be threatened with jail time or a fine for not answering a survey that is going to provide them with more of this kind of material at their door? Quite frankly, I don't think that's necessary.

Do you have any comments on that?

• (0950)

Mr. Doug Norris: Well, certainly, the census is used by people who market, as you say. That's one use of the census. By no means is it the most common application. It's used widely, as you've heard, for policy and planning purposes, by educational institutions.

So that is one application, and in fact it's interesting that in using the census, yes, firms do want to advertise, but they are able to better target their advertisements. For example, they're able to cut down on the number of brochures they send to people who probably won't be interested. I'm sure you will get too many—

Ms. Lois Brown: Oh, I get lots.

Mr. Doug Norris: —but there is a big saving in terms of the environment, in terms of being able to target that information better. So the census is widely, widely used.

Ms. Lois Brown: So why would a business not be prepared to pay for that? Should the Canadian taxpayer be providing that information

without cost to a business, or should it not be a cost of business for the business providing that product to the market?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Doug Norris: The Canadian businesses in our association actually pay a fair bit of money every year to Statistics Canada for the purpose of using the census information. So there is a part of that census that's certainly cost recovered, and businesses, in particular, are fairly large clients of Statistics Canada.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Thank you.

We'll go on to Ms. Mathysen.

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

I want to thank all of you, because you've made this very clear in terms of understanding what is going on and the bits and pieces. Clearly we're not the experts, but you have given expertise that will help us to come to a good decision.

What's been most bizarre or interesting, I guess, about all of this is the motivation behind eliminating unpaid work from the mandatory census and behind the changes. We know it's going to cost about \$300 million more to do this.

We've heard from a number of perspectives. For example, Mr. Norris, you talked about the economic repercussions of eliminating the long-form census, in terms of lower business efficiencies, lower profitability, lower productivity. It seems that's a very significant negative. We've heard from Madame Taillon and Ms. Scott about the general impact on NGOs and service providers and those people who deliver the services to our community.

I come back to trying to understand what on earth the motivation is. The government, despite what we've heard this morning, has gone to considerable pains to point out that no one has ever gone to jail for not completing the long-form census, so it's clearly not a punitive thing.

We've also heard in testimony that the long-form census isn't perceived to be particularly intrusive; people are happy to participate, or at least there is a willingness. This collection of data goes back a long way, and you've said over and over again how essential it is, how important it is, not just to marketing but to the fabric of our society and making sure that what is needed is what is provided.

A number of things struck me, and I want to pursue a number of questions. I'll start with Madame Taillon.

You said that without the long-form census our society will be whiter, more middle-class, and less in need of government services. I want to underscore “less in need of government services”, because the mantra of “less government” seems to be the siren call that we’ve heard over and over.

What are the consequences of this? Could you give me a sense of it? I’m struggling again with motivation.

• (0955)

Ms. Peggy Taillon: Thank you for the question.

There are lots of theories, and we’ve heard them all, percolating. One thing that has been unequivocal is the expertise. The statisticians across the country have said that a volunteer survey will not render the same results as a mandatory survey. There is a lot of evidence that supports the fact that certain groups in Canada will fill out a volunteer survey and others will not: the more vulnerable members of our communities—single parents, people living under a certain income level, as well as certain people living over a certain income level. We also know that new Canadians, immigrants, etc., will struggle. They’re struggling to adapt to the country. Filling out a volunteer survey will not be a great priority, and language is a key issue.

That has been well established by the experts in the country.

There are those who, when you start to think about the motivation.... Is it that we’re trying to paint a different picture of the country? I would hope we’re not, but we have to recognize that the census is used as a tool to determine levels of funding transfer to key programs based on population need. If you draw the line between understanding that and understanding what the expert statisticians are telling us in the country, we believe there is a great risk of less money going to where it’s needed most in this country.

That’s a big problem.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Did anyone else want to comment on that?
[Translation]

Go ahead, Madam.

Dr. Françoise Naudillon: In fact, it would be difficult to guess the secret intentions behind this decision. We don’t have a crystal ball. I still think that, if this decision persists, we will be tragically blinded. I can see the consequences: we could be given any old figures. People will tell us that, after conducting their own private surveys, they have decided this or that based on their own figures, and they will show them to us. That will be done without comparability or reliability, or anything like that

As it was pointed out, the importance of Statistics Canada in general and of its work has to do with the fact that it is a non-political corporation that conducts its own research and fights its own battles without being steered by political demand. This organization is about to lose its independence, and that’s why things are becoming serious, in my opinion.

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Just very quickly, again, Madam Naudillon, this government is currently negotiating all kinds of

trade agreements and is very proud about the one with Colombia and Panama, and currently an agreement with the European Union.

You said that trade agreements and the free market have a very distinct impact on women, who are perhaps impacted more than others by them. Could you elaborate on that?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): A very short answer—

A voice: For a very complicated question!

Voices: Oh, oh!

[Translation]

Dr. Françoise Naudillon: I don’t want to say anything silly, but I just want to talk about a simple consequence quickly. A number of decisions are made at an international level and we are not even aware. Sometimes, it has to do with changing a word or a comma in a text, but that makes all the difference when we compare ourselves to other countries.

As to women in particular, the consequences of going backwards with women’s issues in Canada will go beyond Canada. It will affect Italy, Africa or China, just because...

• (1000)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Thank you.

[Translation]

Dr. Françoise Naudillon: ...international decisions are interconnected.

That’s all I wanted to say.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): We’ll head into round two, a five-minute round, starting with Ms. Simson for the Liberals.

Mrs. Michelle Simson (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I’d like to thank all of the witnesses for appearing.

Every one of our witnesses has brought something very valuable to the table, but certainly not the information in terms of how Canadians see the long-form census as very important and the arbitrary dropping of question 33. I think there was enough outrage about that.

My concern, however, is with the current government’s stunning lack of comprehension of the material we are gathering with the long-form census, the mandatory information. We have a minister who said that a complaint by one person in this country is all it takes to change public policy. So all I can imagine is that there was one person who complained and we’ve changed everything as a result. And the fact that we have another member, quite honestly, who sees this as gathering statistics for flyers...I’m actually stunned, and that I have to sit here and ask questions about something that’s so fundamental....

I did want to pick up on our international obligations. We've been hearing in the news that Canada has been taking hits all around the world for policies that it's buying into. This question 33 came about because the question was specific to a UN conference on women in Beijing, where 181 member nations, including Canada, signed onto that. They signed, which indicates to me it was fairly important globally. They agreed to start to tally and value unpaid work.

Do any of you have any idea if any of the other 180 nations opted out of this "survey" in terms of trying to collect data for unpaid work?

Ms. Katherine Scott: To my knowledge, I don't have any information about a particular country that, having signed, opted out. Certainly different countries have proceeded to develop the indicators to track the status of women pursuant to the Beijing agreements.

What was interesting, of course, was that Canada was a leader in that process. In fact, through the late 1990s, as Leroy was mentioning, there was an enormous investment of energy in Canada to develop equality indicators, which really became benchmarks for other countries around the world. That was true as it pertains to gender equality in aid on the international front and certainly here at home in looking at the status of children.

Statistics Canada played a critical role in our investment in the development of different types of data instruments that were hugely beneficial, not only in understanding the conditions of women in Canada, but also as exemplars, as my colleague has pointed out, for other countries in their own data collection. I can't emphasize too much how important that work was in that period.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Thank you.

The government of the day, the cabinet, was actually quite insistent about it. We've heard testimony, and historical data indicate, that the government of the day in 1995-96 pressed hard to make sure this was included.

I'll come back to your point, Ms. Taillon. Because of the sandwich generation, what I really anticipated was seeing this question expanded and enhanced and broken down. We are seeing more and more women both raising children and looking after aging and/or seriously ill parents, so to have it dropped.... I actually thought it would be quite a bit more expanded. Would that not make sense to any of the witnesses?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Please give just a 30-second answer.

Ms. Peggy Taillon: I absolutely agree. I think we need to do more. We have to recognize that more and more families are carrying the burden of caregiving, and we need to understand what things governments could do to assist those families. We need to know more than we do today, absolutely.

• (1005)

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): We'll go to Mr. Wallace.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to be here today. It's nice to see Ms. Taillon again.

I have a few questions for you. Since I only have five minutes, I'll need a yes or a no to help me get through this.

Based on your testimony today, which was a bit different from the last time we talked, in your opinion the difference between the long-form census and the national survey is the penalties. Is that correct?

Ms. Peggy Taillon: It's the mandatory nature.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Right, so if something is mandatory, you have to have penalties.

Ms. Peggy Taillon: You're absolutely right.

Mr. Mike Wallace: So the penalties are the issue.

Ms. Peggy Taillon: The penalties signify the importance of the census, the importance of the tool. They tell Canadians to fill this out. It's in your absolute best interest, just like seat belts and sending your kids to school and all those things.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Okay. We can come to the agreement, then, that we are sending out almost double the number of surveys, and even at a 70% return rate—down from 95% or 98% or whatever it was—the likelihood is that an additional 800,000 surveys will still come in. Would you agree with that math?

Ms. Peggy Taillon: I agree with the math, but as I said at our last chat—

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): We'll try not to get into debate. We'll just do quick questions and answers. Thank you.

Mr. Mike Wallace: We'll use the response rate of 95%. Since we're at the status of women committee, let me ask you this: did women answer those surveys because of the threat of the penalty, or do you think they answered those questions because they thought it was the right thing to do?

Ms. Peggy Taillon: They answered the questions because they understood that it was an incredibly significant tool and that it was mandatory, which signifies that it's important and that it's in their interest to fill it out.

Mr. Mike Wallace: So the threat had nothing to do with it, then?

Ms. Peggy Taillon: I believe they understand that there is a threat, and they are filling it out because they understand that the threat means this is very important to them as Canadians.

Mr. Mike Wallace: If we promote the national survey in such a way that Canadians understand that it's important information for future policy development and so on, would that encourage Canadians to fill it out?

Ms. Peggy Taillon: I believe you can encourage Canadians all you want, but we all know that the statisticians have unequivocally said it needs to be mandatory to render the results we need. We can increase the sample, but we're still going to get the same results.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Okay.

Here is a question that maybe Mr. Norris can answer for me. Correct me if I'm wrong, but my understanding from testimony at this committee is that question 33, which I think is an important issue, was removed on the recommendation to cabinet of Statistics Canada. You can correct me if I'm wrong on that, but if you don't mind putting your old hat on for a second, would Stats Canada, in previous times, when it came to the long-form census, recommend to cabinet what questions should be added or subtracted?

Mr. Doug Norris: Well, Statistics Canada does submit to cabinet a request for the census and the content, and it might, in the course of doing that, present certain options.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Okay. Thank you.

I need to follow up, for clarification. There seems to be an indication.... And in my view it's a legitimate issue for this committee to be dealing with question 33, but my understanding was that Stats Canada recommended that it be removed for some statistical reason, and—

Hon. Anita Neville: Excuse me. I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Yes.

Hon. Anita Neville: To the best of my knowledge, we have no information that Stats Canada has recommended to the government that question 33 be removed from—

Mr. Mike Wallace: I'm just saying that's my information.

Hon. Anita Neville: There is no information that has come to this committee on that matter.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): I would suggest that this is a point of debate. Perhaps we could keep questions and answers to the witness, please.

Mr. Mike Wallace: How much time do I have left?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): You have a minute.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Thank you.

We're clear, in my view, that from having the survey we're going to have more numbers back. We are removing the threat.

So you believe, based on your testimony today, that having a letter from the Prime Minister attached to the front of it, saying that if you don't fill this out you could face fines, will make a difference in the return rate?

Ms. Peggy Taillon: I believe it will tell Canadians that this is the most important survey they're going to fill out in these five years. And they will fill it out, because Canadians have proven that they do. They understand that it's important, and the mandatory nature tells them that it's important; it reinforces it for them.

•(1010)

Mr. Mike Wallace: One of the questions in the national survey is, even if you do not practise a religion, what do you consider yourself? It asks whether you're Roman Catholic, Anglican, Muslim, and so on

and so forth. Do you think it's appropriate that the Government of Canada threaten you with—and I'm not saying “jail time”, because I know that's never going to happen—a fine, that if you don't feel comfortable telling the Government of Canada, whether you even practise a religion or not, what religion you are, it should carry a \$500 fine?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Unfortunately, we're out of time for any answers, but I'm sure we will have more rounds, and perhaps some of the witnesses will want to pick up on that.

Monsieur Ouellet, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for coming. I feel your being here is important.

At the outset, I would like to tell you that I am the Bloc Québécois' critic for social housing and homelessness. So I know what poverty is. And we really must come to grips with women's poverty.

In response to what Mr. Wallace just told us, being the one who relies on the number of questionnaires, I would like to ask you one thing. Will poor people—we could talk about very rich people, but I am interested in the poor people—the people in the streets answer questionnaires that are not mandatory?

I am asking you because you are responsible for social affairs.

[English]

Ms. Katherine Scott: Based on my understanding of the response rate of low-income Canadians to the census, there is an enormous amount of support—I think Doug and Leroy can probably speak to this—put into assisting different groups of Canadians to fill out the census at that time.

We heard last week, actually at another committee, from a researcher from Saskatchewan, who compared his work on the voluntary surveys of low-income Saskatchewan residents with the census data. The rates were quite different for those groups. In fact, the response rates among low-income groups are much higher in the case of the census. Questions pertaining to their living conditions, and their housing conditions in particular, receive a much higher response rate from those groups on the census.

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: So any government can avoid taking care of the poor, especially in terms of social housing.

Mr. Norris, you said earlier that people's answers depended on whether they were from a rural or urban community and their answers were different. I personally come from a rural riding where 20 or 23% of people are mildly or severely illiterate. If these people are not forced to fill out the questionnaire, they will not do it because it is very frustrating for them to have to ask for help to fill it out.

There are some very awkward questions, almost sexual, as the government would say, for example on the number of bedrooms in the house. It is very frustrating to have to ask for help to answer a question like that. However, what is really frustrating for those people is not knowing how to write. In short, if they are not forced to say what they are experiencing, they won't do it.

What do you think about that?

[English]

Mr. Doug Norris: I think the evidence is in fact that people such as these, who are somewhat marginalized, would be less likely to fill out the census form. I would agree with you that they will therefore be underrepresented in a voluntary census. When it is mandatory, I think they realize, despite the struggle they have and despite their reluctance, that it is important, and as a Canadian citizen they feel they want to contribute to it. That signal of "mandatory" is sent to them, and as a result they fill it out, despite their reluctance. Without the mandatory aspect, they may feel, well, let someone else fill it out.

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Thank you, Mr. Norris.

Ms. Naudillon, could you tell me whether the academic and scientific communities were consulted before the government made the decision to change the census?

Dr. Françoise Naudillon: My answer will be quick. No, not to my knowledge. We were all taken aback by this.

Mr. Christian Ouellet: They actually come back to the same argument all the time. As a scientist, would you say that a question on the number of rooms in a house is something really annoying, which could jeopardize a person's privacy?

Dr. Françoise Naudillon: I always thought it was strange that we spend so much time talking about this question. All you actually have to do is go on the Internet and consult the land register to find out the name of the owner, the size of the house and the number of rooms. So it is not an intrusive question.

However, it allows us to really see what Canada's real estate heritage is, the number of rooms or square metres per person. In my opinion, this indicator is essential for determining every Canadian's level of poverty and comfort.

Mr. Christian Ouellet: So it is an indicator...

• (1015)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Thank you.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Next we have Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I know that Mr. Wallace would want this information. The "2011 Census Content Consultation Guide" that goes out to stakeholders said absolutely nothing about eliminating the mandatory nature of the long-form census, nor did it glean any information from stakeholders about removing question 33.

I know that Mr. Wallace would want to have accurate information. My question is—

Mr. Mike Wallace: On a point of order—

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Excuse me, we have a point of order first.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Is this going to interfere with my time?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Your time is on hold.

Mr. Mike Wallace: No, of course not. You have as much time as you want.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

Mr. Mike Wallace: I have a copy of the presentation that was being presented by Stats Canada. It says: "The possibility of removing the unpaid work questions from the long-form census was raised in the 2011 Census content report released in July 2008"—

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Excuse me.

Mr. Mike Wallace: My point of order is that she was saying it wasn't in the report. I have it that it was.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: I have it in writing that it was not.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Excuse me.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Well, you have it as part of the minutes of this committee.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: I'm sorry, Mr. Wallace. I didn't want you to be misled.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Excuse me. Let's have no back and forth, please.

I believe members take some liberties, and we know that our analysts are able to look at witnesses and testimonies from the past. Let's keep our questioning directly to the witnesses and use their valuable time appropriately.

Neither, I don't believe, was a point of order.

Thank you.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that.

My question is to Mr. Stone. I wonder what technical testing and evaluation was done to assess the impact of removing the unpaid activity question from all national census or survey instruments in 2011.

Mr. Leroy Stone: I was not party to the process that led to the decision-making within Statistics Canada, but I hope my memory is correct when I say that the evaluation process consisted of the consultation that was done with various groups of users. The consultation process was the platform used.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

There were many interesting things about all of this, and one of the most interesting has to do with the response of the public.

Madam Taillon, you talked about 370 stakeholders and organizations that spoke out because they were so profoundly concerned, but you also said there were a number of groups that did not speak out because they feared repercussions. Could you elaborate on that statement?

Ms. Peggy Taillon: Certainly.

We are part of a very broad network in civil society. We also have partners in the private sector and at other levels of government. As we've been out doing work and connecting with partners, obviously this issue comes up on a regular basis. Some groups have indicated—to me, personally—their concerns. They are concerned that speaking out could have some negative repercussions because they receive funding from government or they could be working on a project with government, so they've decided to stay silent.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Their situation would be similar to those of Match, Sexual Health Network, Kairos, and organizations like that. Thank you.

I hope I have time for one last thing. Marilyn Waring, a former New Zealand Conservative MP who was commenting on the elimination of the census, said in an interview, “I see this mirrored in so many conservative governments in the post-recession period. They want to rule according to ideology, not according to evidence, so one of the most important things they can do is to obliterate evidence so they can operate on the basis of propaganda.”

Does anyone have a response to Ms. Waring?

• (1020)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Katherine Scott: I think that's an astute observation. One of the things that people haven't come back to is that the decision around the long-form census is taking place in a broader context: a number of other surveys have been eliminated, and there have been significant cutbacks at Statistics Canada. The amount of analysis and actual publication of information flowing into the public domain has been significantly reduced. I have experienced that as a researcher and I know that to be the case in the public domain. We've lost the disability survey this year. We've lost a number of immigrant surveys.

These are all taken as a piece of the loss of quality of analysis that we now have to make profound economic and social decisions. It has been compromised. I think that's an important background piece for you in your consideration and deliberations in this committee.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): I actually moved to a four-minute round when we promised you the full five, so you have 40 seconds left.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: I have one last question, then, in terms of recommendations. Obviously we're going to look at all of the evidence, but what recommendations should this committee be forwarding? Should, for example, Statistics Canada report back to this committee about findings after the 2011 census data collection?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Go ahead, Ms. Taillon.

Ms. Peggy Taillon: I think the one key issue, given the mandate of this committee, is to have question 33 not only re-added but also expanded. I think this is very critical. Given the mandate of this committee, I think that's a key recommendation.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Wallace, please.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for ruling my point of order out of order.

I just want to be clear to the committee. I am looking at the speaking notes from the Standing Committee on the Status of Women for November 16, 2011. They express thanks for inviting Statistics Canada to speak to the committee, introduce who they are, and—

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Excuse me—

Mr. Mike Wallace: Oh, it's 2010. I apologize.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Go ahead. We won't interrupt.

Mr. Mike Wallace: In their presentation to this committee—and you can look it up for yourselves—part of the presentation says, “The possibility of removing the unpaid work questions from the long-form census was raised in the 2011 content report released in July 2008”, and it goes on and talks about it. That's where I got my information, and it's part of the record of the committee.

I don't mind being accused of misleading, but when the accusation is wrong, I like to point that out, so there you go.

My question for you, Mr. Norris, is on bias. You said—and we've heard it from others too—that the national survey may have some built-in bias if certain groups don't answer the survey. I would tend to agree that there's a possibility that those in the higher income levels may not be that excited about the survey. I'm not as convinced that those who are at other income levels or in other statuses are going to be less likely.

There was bias in the census previously. I don't know the number off the top of my head, but there were, for example, a number of people who answered the religion question by saying that they were Jedi knights, so there were built-in issues in terms of bias or inaccurate information regardless of whether the survey was mandatory or not. Would you agree with that?

Mr. Doug Norris: Certain errors always come into a census, for many reasons. A small number of people may, as you say, report being Jedi, but the feeling of the census experts is that those numbers are relatively small. Overall, yes, there is theoretically bias, but it really doesn't affect, for example, the trends in the information we get.

• (1025)

Mr. Mike Wallace: Your organization, Marketing Research and Intelligence Association, is an association. It's made up of people who are in the survey business, I'm assuming, people who buy survey information. Who is your membership?

Mr. Doug Norris: There are two parts. There are survey researchers who carry out research, surveys, and other kinds of research for governments, the private sector, and non-profit organizations. There are also the businesses that use the data. For example, some of Canada's large and small businesses are members as users of the information.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Would your members who are in the survey business consider the work they do to be inaccurate?

Mr. Doug Norris: No. I think that overall they feel the work they do is fairly accurate.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Is it mandatory or voluntary?

Mr. Doug Norris: It's voluntary; however, they adjust their surveys by using that mandatory census in order to make it accurate, and they are concerned that without that standard to adjust to, there will be more inaccuracy in their data.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Do they have a rule that they work by so that it's accurate within so many points, or something like that?

Mr. Doug Norris: Every survey has a certain inaccuracy about it because of its sample size. One doesn't really know what the effect will be of not having the gold standard.

Mr. Mike Wallace: If the national survey has a bigger sample size and a bigger return rate, is there not potential for it to be more accurate?

Mr. Doug Norris: No. The sample size is not related to the bias and the accuracy. The sample size is one aspect of accuracy, but the bias, which doesn't go away regardless of whether you up the sample size, is still there.

Mr. Mike Wallace: I agree with you.

We had a presentation from another organization saying that if we sent an all-English survey into a French community, the survey would be useless, and I would agree. I thought it was a lousy example, because whether you send two or two million English surveys into an all-French community, you're going to get a lousy return.

Do you not agree that building biases into the survey is something that...? Your organization tries to remove the bias piece because it automatically affects the results. Is that not correct?

Mr. Doug Norris: That's right.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): The time is up. Do you have a one-sentence response?

Mr. Mike Wallace: He said, "Yes".

Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): Okay. We won't have time to go into another round.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for coming and taking the time to present on this very important topic.

We'll suspend for a minute, and then we have about five minutes of updating.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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