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Chair

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc

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• (1530)

[Translation]

The Chair (Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP)): We will now begin the fourth meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Good afternoon, everyone. I would first like to welcome the Hon. Kellie Leitch, Minister of Status of Women, who will give a presentation today. I would also like to welcome Ms. Suzanne Clément, Coordinator and Head of Agency, Office of the Coordinator, as well as Ms. Johanne Tremblay, Director, Corporate Services and Chief Financial Officer.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), we will commence consideration of the Supplementary Estimates (B) 2013-2014, Vote 25B, under Human Resources and Skills Development.

I now invite the minister to provide her opening statement, for about seven minutes. This will be followed by our first round of questions, with seven minutes for each speaker from all the parties who are on the list.

Ms. Leitch, you have the floor.

[English]

Hon. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Status of Women): Madam Chair, prior to our beginning and my time allotment, I wanted to make sure that everyone at the committee had one of our white ribbons. If you'd like a permanent one, we have them here. I'll ask Suzanne to distribute them, if that's all right. I'm sure people would like a permanent one instead of the other. You can wear them throughout the 16 days of activism.

[Translation]

Madam Chair, members of the committee, I am pleased to be here in my role as Minister of Status of Women.

[English]

I'm accompanied today, as was mentioned before, by Suzanne Clément, the coordinator of Status of Women Canada, and Johanne Tremblay, the agency's chief financial officer.

We're here today on supplementary estimates (B) for Status of Women, for which there is one item. The agency is receiving a loan to enable reallocation of its headquarters as part of PWGSC's lease purchase project.

• (1535)

[Translation]

I would also like to take this opportunity to tell you about my first four months as Minister of Status of Women.

[English]

I've spent the last number of months visiting with women, men, boys, and girls in nearly every region of the country, and I've listened to their concerns and what their views are for the priorities for our government. What they've told me is that they like a society where women can live safely and securely, where they can be assured of economic prosperity, and where opportunities for leadership and decision-making roles are available to them.

Our government shares these goals and priorities. We're committed to promoting the full participation of women in the economic, social, and democratic life of Canada. We are working to achieve this by having a direct impact on people's lives and getting real, measurable results that will not only work for women, but for all Canadians.

As you know, Canada has weathered the economic storm very well, especially compared to other countries. Our economic recovery and growing prosperity depends on the economic prosperity of women, who in turn influence the prosperity of their families and their communities. If Canada is to continue to be one of the most prosperous nations in the world, women must be able to fully participate and contribute to job creation and fuelling our country's economic growth.

Our government's recent Speech from the Throne, "Seizing Canada's Moment", outlined a number of initiatives that would benefit women, including the creation of jobs, opportunities in the skilled trades, and investments in the natural resources and forestry sectors.

[Translation]

It is these same initiatives that were the inspiration for the theme of this year's Women's History Month, *Canadian Women Pioneers: inspiring change through ongoing leadership*. Every day during the month of October, a woman pioneer of the past and present was profiled in areas such as science, technology, skilled trades, natural resources and construction.

[English]

My apologies to those of you whose first language is French. This is my first go at this, so my apologies for my limited capacity in French.

It is these same initiatives that were the inspiration for the theme of this year's Women's History Month: Canadian women pioneers: Inspiring change through ongoing leadership. Such women as Dr. Roberta Bondar, a Canadian astronaut; Annette Verschuren; and Hilda Broomfield Letemplier of Newfoundland, who owns and operates Pressure Pipe Steel Fabrication Ltd., are the women we highlight as pioneers of today.

We know women account for less than 25% of the total information and technology workforce in Canada. Our government, through Status of Women Canada, has recently supported six projects in communities like Summerside, P.E.I., Waterloo, Ontario, and Vancouver, B.C. These investments will help more women participate in Canada's technology sectors. That's good for Canadian women and it's good for Canada.

In fact, since 2007 the Government of Canada has provided more than \$46 million in funding through Status of Women Canada for projects to increase women's economic security and prosperity. Just last month I met with the Advisory Council for Promoting Women on Boards to discuss ways to increase women's representation in positions of economic leadership in Canada.

I have been asked several times since becoming minister why this is a priority.

First, it increases economic opportunities for women, and that's good for Canada's economy. It reinforces and contributes to our government's number one priority of creating jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity for all Canadians.

Second, the business case for doing so is very strong. I don't have to convince you of the gains realized by companies when they have access to the widest pool of talent available for their boards. Increasing the participation of women on corporate boards sends an important signal to the marketplace, and that helps attract even more talented women to corporate ranks of all companies.

Third, it helps us all ensure that young women have role models in leadership positions that would serve as a source of inspiration and mentorship in the future.

Our government will continue to work to increase the number of women and girls in leadership and decision-making roles. Since 2007, through Status of Women Canada, we've delivered \$21 million in funding to grassroots organizations in communities across the country, including Quebec City, Saskatoon, and Halifax, as well as to national organizations like the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, all to support women entering into leadership and decision-making roles.

Ending violence against women and girls is an important priority for our government and I think for everyone at this committee. Yesterday we recognized the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and launched the 16 days of activism against gender violence in Canada. I want to take a moment now to share with you some of the accomplishments to help end violence against women and girls, as well as to outline some of our future priorities.

We are all troubled—I know that I am—by ongoing reports in our communities and in the media about incidents of violence against

women and girls across Canada and across the globe. These incidents serve as a constant reminder that for many women and girls the threat of violence is a reality that causes untold damage on these individuals, their families, their communities, and their friends. I mentioned yesterday in the press conference I was involved in, that as a pediatric surgeon nothing is more heartbreaking and at the same time enraging than meeting a young woman, an adolescent, in the emergency department with her broken arm when you know it's the result of her being hit or beaten. I'm not their primary physician, but in these cases we all have a responsibility to end this type of violence and all types of violence.

The economic impact is also significant. In Canada, the economic cost of spousal violence against women is estimated to be \$4.8 billion per year.

Ending all forms of violence against women and girls is a priority for our government and we've taken significant steps to make our communities safer. As stated in the Speech from the Throne, our government has introduced new legislation that will give police and prosecutors new tools to address cyberbullying. This legislation will also create a new criminal offence prohibiting the non-consensual distribution of intimate images.

Our government passed the Safe Streets and Communities Act to improve the safety of all Canadians. We also launched a national action plan to combat human trafficking, and we are increasing penalties for violent crimes. Just a week ago I announced a new call for proposals entitled, "Cyber and Sexual Violence: Helping Communities Respond". It will support projects at the local level to help prevent violence against women and girls. In fact, since 2007 the government has provided more than \$62 million in funding through Status of Women for projects to end violence against women and girls. As I mentioned before, there are current examples of this: a number in Saskatchewan communities to reduce violence against women and girls in rural settings; and in Fredericton, New Brunswick, where young people are engaged in reducing and preventing sexual violence on post-secondary education campuses. National organizations are developing online tools for engaging men and boys to end gender-based violence across the country.

Globally, the promotion and protection of women's human rights will continue to be central for our government. Malala Yousafzai has become a role model for the world by courageously risking her life to promote education for girls and young women. I'm proud of our government's decision to bestow honorary citizenship on her in recognition of her heroism and her power to inspire girls and women around the globe. In addition, when I was at the United Nations in New York to participate in the International Day of the Girl Child on October 11, I was very pleased to formally announce that Canada will be working with our country partners to pursue the first-ever, stand-alone resolution on child, early, and forced marriage during this year's UN General Assembly.

●(1540)

In closing, let me reiterate that more than ever before, Canada needs the contributions and participation of women and girls in all aspects of society. Our government understands the challenges and complex nature of the issues affecting women and girls, and we're committed to promoting their full and equal participation in the economy, and the social and democratic life here in Canada.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We will now begin our question and answer period.

Ms. Truppe, you have the floor.

[English]

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

I would like to thank you, Minister, for taking the time to come and speak with us and answer our questions. I am happy to welcome you here today, as we are aware you have a very busy schedule. On behalf of this committee, I would like to thank you for all you're doing for women and girls in Canada.

I want to mention that in your speech you said, "If Canada is to continue to be one of the most prosperous nations in the world, women must be able to fully participate and contribute to job creation and fuelling economic growth". Thank you for saying that, because I think it is so true.

As you mentioned in your remarks, yesterday was the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the first day of the 16 days of activism against gender violence in Canada.

Violence against women is a concern for this government and for all Canadians. It ruins lives, destroys families, and takes a heavy toll on the economy. On average, every five days, a woman in Canada is killed in a domestic homicide. Women are more likely than men to experience certain forms of violence. For example, they are 11 times more likely to be a victim of a sexual offence and three times more likely to be criminally harassed.

In 2009, Statistics Canada estimated the economic cost of spousal abuse at \$4.8 billion annually. These figures are very concerning. That is why our government continues to take decisive action across departments to combat violence against women and girls. Some examples are the passing of the Safe Streets and Communities Act, launching the national action plan to combat human trafficking, the stiffer legislation for cyberbullying that was announced recently, and of course, our own call for proposals on cyber and sexual violence.

One thing I really like is we passed Bill S-2, a very important bill that gave women on reserves the same rights that we sitting here today have.

I certainly believe that in order to be successful in combatting all types of violence against women, we need to work together as a government to accomplish this goal.

Minister, could you please inform this committee what Status of Women Canada has done and is currently doing to address the issue of violence against women and girls?

●(1545)

Hon. Kellie Leitch: Thank you very much for the question. I have to thank Ms. Truppe for her outstanding work as the Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women.

I appreciate the question. I think it's very top of mind, this being one of the 16 days of activism regarding violence against women and girls. As I mentioned in my notes, since 2007, the Government of Canada, Status of Women Canada has funded over sixty-two million dollars' worth of projects, in fact, over 300 locally based projects to end violence against women and girls. It's the highest funding level, ever, in this file.

A number of the projects are worth highlighting. The reason I highlight them at this time—as I mentioned yesterday when we had our small press conference to launch our 16 days of activism against violence against women and girls—is that I think it's important for all Canadians to participate. Whether it is by wearing a ribbon, participating in a local community project, or getting involved in one of the existing projects, this is an opportunity for all of us to take on this joint responsibility.

By way of example, one of the projects funded by Status of Women Canada is promoting healthy youth relationships. The Canadian Red Cross has received over \$300,000 for a 31-month project to raise awareness of the relationships of violence, and promoting healthy relationships among boys and girls 14 to 18 years old.

Another project I mentioned engages young people to prevent violence against women on post-secondary campuses. This is a particularly excellent project, where the Fredericton Sexual Assault Crisis Centre has received \$200,000 for a 28-month project to enhance the capacity of multiple post-secondary education institutions. St. Thomas University, the University of New Brunswick, and New Brunswick Community College are all working on a plan to respond to violence against women and girls on their campuses, something we've heard about in other areas of the country.

As I mentioned before, I'm very pleased with our historic funding levels. I want to encourage as many Canadians as possible. I hope that everyone around this table will actively participate in the 16 days of activism to reduce and prevent violence against women and girls across the country.

Obviously, this is something very important to me, as I know it is to all of you and to our government. It's one of our number one priorities.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you.

One thing I've noticed is that our government has nearly doubled our investments in local community projects. A large number of these projects are aimed at reducing violence against women and girls. This is an impressive accomplishment, which we're very proud of.

Could you give us a couple of examples of local community projects that our government is currently funding?

Hon. Kellie Leitch: Thank you very much for the question.

I'll start by outlining just a couple of the facts that I think we all need to be aware of, and therefore why these local community projects are so important.

In 2011, eight out of ten victims of police-reported crimes for violence against women were those that were by an intimate partner. As mentioned by Ms. Truppe earlier, on average, every five days a Canadian woman has an altercation with her intimate partner that may result in her death. These are concerns. These are things that all Canadians are concerned about, and this issue is one which our government makes one of its highest priorities.

By way of example, contributing to the prevention of honour crimes and violence against women and girls by developing community screening programs and information is a project that's run by the Shield of Athena in Quebec. It's a program that has received over \$348,000 for a 36-month project. This is a community-based project that informs women and their communities about gender-based violence, including honour crimes, and the legislation concerning those crimes so that they can empower themselves. Training is provided to liaison workers for culturally related communities, and provides information and identifies at-risk situations so that these women can protect themselves.

Another project that I was involved in announcing myself, which I think is particularly important for reaching out to younger generations, is the Huddle Up and Make the Call program that is run in Ontario. It's actually a partnership between the White Ribbon Campaign and the Toronto Argonauts. This is a campaign that receives \$600,000 for a 36-month project to engage men and boys in addressing violence against women and girls. What better way to make sure that young men understand that they need to have appropriate behaviours than having their role models and idols, large football players—I have to say that; when I stood between them, I looked like a little peanut—explaining to them what appropriate behaviours are.

These are just two of the projects we've been involved in. I think Status of Women Canada is doing an outstanding job of picking appropriate local community projects to make sure that Canadian women are protected.

• (1550)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Truppe.

I will now give the floor to Ms. Mathyssen.

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

[English]

Thank you, Minister.

First of all, thank you for the white ribbon. I think it's important to acknowledge the fear and the pain that women who are abused face. Also, I regard this as a remembrance of Jack Layton, the co-founder of the White Ribbon Campaign to end violence.

Minister, you are certainly welcome here today. It's been quite a while. In fact, I think it was March 2012 since the Minister of Status of Women has been to this committee. Since it's your committee I know your appearance here—and the more often the better in the future—would be most appreciated.

My first question is in regard to the 2010 Native Women's Association collection of data. As you know, that was collecting data on the nearly 600 missing and murdered indigenous women. Unfortunately, that money was diverted away by the government from Sisters in Spirit, and since that time, there have been no new numbers. We know that the violence continues and that more indigenous women are missing, trafficked, kidnapped, and even killed.

Last year we saw an overwhelming consensus among the premiers of Canada, as well as the AFN and NWAC, calling for a national inquiry and action plan into missing and murdered indigenous women. The NDP, as I'm sure you know, has also called for this inquiry.

Violence against missing and murdered aboriginal women, against indigenous women, in general, has been studied almost 30 times by this Parliament and previous Parliaments, yet recommendations from these studies seem not to be implemented. They seem to, as the president of NWAC said, go on a shelf.

Will your government conduct the inquiry that's been asked for?

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Madam Chair, on a point of order, I'm not sure that this is the right committee for missing and murdered aboriginal women. There is a committee that is struck for that.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: It seems to me, Madam Chair, that we're talking about violence against women, and this is certainly violence against women.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Madam Chair, Status of Women doesn't have anything to do with the inquiry. It's a whole other committee that's studying missing and murdered aboriginal women.

The Chair: Thank you very much for the comment.

I will still let the minister answer since it's an issue related to violence against women.

• (1555)

Hon. Kellie Leitch: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

As I mentioned before, obviously the government is very committed to ending violence against women and girls. It's always very concerning to hear these numbers.

To focus on what Status of Women Canada has done, because that's why we are here today, there have been some substantive projects that Status of Women Canada has focused on in order to make sure that aboriginal women are protected and educated, and also that this issue is dealt with.

By way of example, one of our projects is Together for Justice on Language, Violence and Responsibility. The Liard Aboriginal Women's Society has received over \$260,000 for a 36-month project to assist aboriginal women to transition to violence-free lives. Obviously, that's what we all want to attain. By building relationships between aboriginal women and law enforcement officials, as well as service providers, social services delivery, and policing for women who are living in Yukon communities, they will have an opportunity to have the improvement that we want to see, improvement through the development of protocols, law enforcement, and orientation.

On March 8, 2012, our protocol for building safer communities was confirmed, and a relationship, obviously with the RCMP, was signed. I think this is a huge establishment.

What we are doing at Status of Women Canada, as I mentioned before, is focusing on local projects, making sure that local community leaders, local law enforcement, local health care providers, and these aboriginal women know exactly what should best be done.

This is one of our projects, just one of several, that Status of Women Canada has invested in to make sure that goal is being attained. Obviously, this speaks to the fact that our government is focused on making sure that a priority for this government is to end violence against women and girls.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Well, thank you, Minister. I would have appreciated a yes or no in terms of the inquiry.

I'm sure you're aware that my colleague Ms. Ashton has tabled motion M-444. It outlines a national action plan to end violence against women in Canada. This is something that the UN has called for from every country by 2015. In fact, the rapporteur was here last summer and seemed concerned about the fact that Canada was lagging.

Are you—is this country—developing such a national action plan?

Hon. Kellie Leitch: Thank you very much for the question.

I'm looking for one specific date, because I want to be very specific with you.

With respect to a national action plan, the government, as I've mentioned before, is very committed to protecting women and girls from all forms of violence and to holding offenders accountable for their actions. There's a number of actions that we've taken already in addition to what I mentioned before, which is the almost doubling of our funding support since 2007 at Status of Women Canada.

What are those items? One is passing the Safe Streets and Communities Act, which improves safety for all Canadians. The second is increasing the support for victims of crime. The third is the national action plan to combat human trafficking. We've invested in shelters through CMHC and, in particular, the shelters enhancement program, which has benefited Canadians across the country.

We've launched a website that I hope all of you as committee members have taken a look at and also shared with your friends: women.gc.ca/violence. This is a spectacular website, I have to say. I was introduced to it prior to becoming minister, but have had an

opportunity to review it even more since. It encourages Canadians to be part of the solution of ending violence against women and girls.

With respect to international commitments—this was the date that I was looking for—Canada has committed in writing to the United Nations as of February 28, 2013, to move forward with respect to this issue.

Our government has been very focused. Even most recently, I announced that there was a call for proposals in regard to cyber and sexual violence. We're looking for people to send in new opportunities for local community projects. The call proposal closing date is December 1.

We are moving forward with a number of actions, things that I know Canadians have asked for. We will continue to move in that vein, making sure that we're committed to the actions that Canadians are expecting of us. It's what I've heard all across the country from younger to older Canadians, and we're delivering on those things they've asked for.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Ms. Mathysen.

• (1600)

[English]

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome, Minister. We certainly are glad to have you with us today.

First of all, I want to assure you, as you know and all of us here know, that making people aware of the many issues facing women and girls is an important goal of this committee, and we are striving to make this happen. We certainly appreciate your leadership in this work and what we do together to make this all happen.

I noticed in your speech that you drew attention to the fact that ending all forms of violence against women and girls is a priority for our government and that we've taken significant steps to make our communities safer for women, girls and all Canadians. You also said that as per the recent Speech from the Throne, our government has introduced legislation that will give police and prosecutors new tools to address cyberbullying.

This is one issue that has received a lot of attention recently, that of aggressive behaviour toward young people over the Internet. We certainly are very familiar with this. The media has actively covered stories of cyberbullying and other forms of cyberviolence that often have tragic results.

Sadly, young women are most likely to be victimized by this modern form of violence. I know that concerned parents are actively looking for ways to help protect their children when they are online or using technology such as cellphones. Coming from a classroom and being a former teacher, I am very much aware of this. The issue is of great concern to all of us.

Could you please inform this committee on what Status of Women Canada is doing to equip Canadian communities with strategies to combat cyberbullying and cyberviolence?

Hon. Kellie Leitch: Thank you very much for the question. I greatly appreciate it.

I know that for the younger people, particularly in your riding and in areas across the country, this is very top of mind. One of the things that I heard, having travelled across the country after becoming minister... I visited many high schools, and whether it was at the Sacred Heart School of Halifax, or high schools in Kelowna or in downtown Toronto, young Canadians told me that cyberbullying, cyberviolence, is something that is extremely important to them and they want it combatted. Their parents do as well.

The Government of Canada, as I've said before, is committed to ending violence against women and girls. One of the things we discussed—Madam Clément and I had this opportunity just in the first week of my becoming a minister—is what focus we should have as our first call for proposals, with me as the new minister. Our determination, after meeting with a number of students across the country, as well as meeting with parents, was cyberviolence.

This was extremely top of mind, but also exceptionally important. I think we all know of the tragedy of the loss of young people like Rehtaeh Parsons and others from the Maritimes.

Our recent call for proposals is yet another example of taking action to address violence against women and girls. The call solicits funding applications for projects that prevent or eliminate cyberviolence. A second component is to prevent or respond to sexual violence against women and girls through access to community programs. Individuals across the country can apply for up to \$175,000 for a local project, or if you're running a national project, \$300,000 for those that are national in scope.

We have seen in the past that these calls for proposals have been very impactful in local communities. The national programs have developed great online tools and national tools for organizations across the country to utilize. I'm delighted to be moving forward with this.

I would encourage even people at this panel, if you have local community groups that are interested in this file, to please encourage them to apply for their local community project between now and December 1.

Thank you very much for the question.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Moving on, as well, you mentioned Fredericton and universities. Coming from New Brunswick, I'm happy to hear you say that. I also want to assure you that in our small community of Miramichi, where we have a community college, I have met with a couple of teachers from there who were spending a lot of time introducing different ideas and different projects this week, and making this become very much aware.

I guess all of New Brunswick...and I give a tip of the hat to the Miramichiers for stepping out and doing this, especially one lady who comes from a large family, who has that motherly way of wanting to protect everybody on the river. She certainly is doing a great job at promoting this.

Are there any other initiatives our government is doing to address this sensitive issue?

• (1605)

Hon. Kellie Leitch: As I mentioned in my comments before, and this is a very important issue, as I think everyone here knows, the Minister of Justice made a recent announcement introducing legislation that will give police and prosecutors new tools for addressing cyberbullying. This is something which I think all Canadians are pleased is moving forward. This legislation will create a new criminal offence prohibiting non-consensual distribution of intimate images.

Having spoken with, as you say, a number of young Canadians as well as their parents, I know that this is something that's been top of mind, something they've been requesting, so I was delighted to see the Minister of Justice moving forward on that. It goes hand in glove with our call for proposals. I think it will bode well for the Canadian public. This addresses something that's very top of mind and stresses the importance of eliminating violence against women and girls.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Thank you.

The Chair: You have one more minute.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: I just want to reiterate what my other colleagues have been saying, about how important it is that we keep this as a very important issue in all of our studies.

I'm certainly proud and happy to have you here with us today. I certainly will take the message back home and send words of congratulations as well for the job they are doing.

Hon. Kellie Leitch: Thank you very much. I'm delighted that the people in Miramichi are getting together to put forward a proposal. I look forward to reviewing it. Similar to many of the proposals that we've received over the last number of years—a record number of over 600—more than 300 projects are focused on violence against women and girls since 2007. I think it's something everyone should be very proud of. As I say, with respect to the local community projects, we're looking forward to hearing about the one from Miramichi.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: I will assure them of your confidence and your support.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. O'Neill Gordon.

Thank you, Minister.

I now invite Mr. Dion to take the floor. You have seven minutes.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It is an honour for me to be part of your committee today. I am also honoured and pleased to be Kirsty Duncan for a few moments.

Minister, congratulations on your new responsibilities. They are not very new to you as you were appointed a few months ago already, but this is the first opportunity I have had to congratulate you.

[English]

I would like to focus, at least at the beginning, on the word “danger” and its definition. In the Canada Labour Code, the definition of “danger” includes:

...any exposure to a hazardous substance that is likely to result in a chronic illness, in disease or in damage to the reproductive system;

The problem is that in your government's new omnibus budget bill—and these bills always come with surprises that have nothing to do with the budget itself—we discover a new definition of the word “danger” that will replace the current one in the Canada Labour Code, where the damage to the reproductive system will not be mentioned.

First, are you aware of this change?

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Madam Chair, on a point of order, I'm not sure what the Canada Labour Code has to do with the status of women and supplementary estimates (B).

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I'm speaking about the reproductive system. That definition will affect many women at work, so I think it's very relevant.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: It's not relevant to Status of Women. We're supposed to be talking about supplementary estimates (B). That's what the meeting is for.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Dion, you have the floor.

[English]

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I'm very surprised that my colleague would question the fact that we speak about a danger to the reproductive system with respect to the status of women. If she doesn't see the link, I think she's alone on that.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Truppe and Mr. Dion.

We are discussing the dangers women may face at work. Given the expertise of the Minister of Status of Women, who is with us today, I would like to hear her opinion on the issue.

Minister, you have the floor.

[English]

Hon. Kellie Leitch: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I will say that I am here in my capacity as the Minister of Status of Women, not as the Minister of Labour, but I'm happy to answer your question.

I want to be very clear, as I have been in the press. The ability to refuse to work for any employee, whether a woman or a man, continues. This is not changed in the code. Whether it be the opposition, the media, or others who may want to refute it, this is not changed.

I'd like to say that what we're doing with the code is actually enhancing and focusing on the internal responsibility system. I think the thing that is most important to employers and employees is that right there on the ground they can make a decision and move forward to make sure that workers, whether they be women or men,

are not put in harm's way. This is something that I take very seriously.

The statistics are very clear with respect to making sure that Canadians are safe in the workplace. We need to take this very seriously. We are encouraging employers to take this very seriously, and they have. We also encourage employees to do the same, to make sure they're stepping up if they are concerned with respect to any workplace issue. This is a joint responsibility.

If the employer and employee are unable to resolve their issue right then and there, they can call a health and safety officer from the labour program in Canada, who is well trained and focused 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to intervene with respect to their concern. This is something which we pride ourselves in as Canadians.

I was travelling through Central and South America recently, and I have to say that the one thing Canadians should be exceptionally proud of is our health and safety system in the workplace. We have a circumstance where other countries want to be like us. They are asking Canadians to train them because we are second to none. We should be exceptionally proud of our health and safety officers. They do outstanding work.

What we are doing with the Canada Labour Code is focusing and making sure that there are opportunities for workers, employers, and employees to come to resolution immediately on the job. Instead of having to wait for someone to show up to make sure that the issue they're concerned about is resolved, they can deal with it immediately themselves and move forward. That's what we want to have happen. We want to make sure that workers in this country are empowered. We're providing them that opportunity. As I said before, every worker in the country continues to have the ability to refuse to work at any point in time.

• (1610)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Minister, I don't question your commitment to the protection of the health of Canadians. It's why I guess you will certainly revisit this decision to take the reference to damage to the reproductive system out of the definition of the word “danger” as it is in the Canada Labour Code. There is no reason to do that. Can you tell me a reason to do that?

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Madam Chair, on a point of order, this meeting is supposed to be on supplementary estimates (B). They are getting into labour issues. What was the point of having this meeting?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I made my point about that. I think it's about the reproductive system. The minister said she is very concerned about health, that it's important to her, so I'm asking the question. She spoke about a lot of different things, but she did not address my question as to why she is supporting the move of this government to change the definition of the word “danger” in the Canada Labour Code in a way that will eliminate any reference to the reproductive system.

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): On a point of order, Madam Chair, can we have a ruling on whether this is relevant to the discussion? We only have the minister for a certain amount of time. I know that I for one would like to hear the minister talk to Status of Women department issues, and it's clear to me that this has nothing to do with her portfolio as Minister of Status of Women.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ambler.

As I already mentioned, we are discussing the conditions in the workplace for women, and Mr. Dion's point was regarding women. Given the minister's expertise as Minister of Status of Women, I ask her to respond to the question, which she did.

Mr. Dion, do you have another question on the same topic?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Madam Chair, I did not get an answer to my question. Why was the reference to the reproductive system removed from the definition of the word "danger"?

The Chair: I would ask...

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Madam Chair, I am sorry to interrupt, but I have the right to get an answer to my question. I would also like you to ensure that all the time that was wasted is not docked from my speaking time.

The Chair: The clock has been stopped. We have taken this into consideration. Please go on and ask your question.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Why has the reference to the reproductive system been removed from the definition of "danger" in the Canada Labour Code?

[English]

Hon. Kellie Leitch: Madam Chair, as I mentioned before, we have been very focused on making sure that women, as well as men, are safe in the workplace.

As I mentioned before, with regard to the health and safety of Canadians, something I think Canadians don't fully appreciate is that our health and safety officers are second to none in the world. Our health and safety officers are cherished and other countries want emulate them.

Ten days ago I was in Colombia. I can tell you that they were asking for Canadians to train them, through our labour program, to make sure they are meeting the health and safety standards that we have here. The same occurred in Mexico, where they were asking for exactly that.

We are very focused on making sure that workplaces in Canada are safe so that fewer injuries take place, whether they be physical injuries, or even those that may be seen as injuries related to mental health related. The Government of Canada, in fact, my predecessor as Minister of Labour, launched a national voluntary standard with respect to mental health, something which Canadian women have been asking to have for quite some time.

These are issues that are top of mind. These are issues we are dealing with at Labour Canada. These are issues that Canadian women care about immensely. We're making sure that workplaces are safer for them, so that they can go to work, be healthy and happy, and return to their families so they can enjoy their evenings at home, or perhaps their mornings after a night of being on call, as I might do.

I would encourage the member to stay focused on why we're here today. I'm delighted to be here as the Minister of Status of Women and to focus on those things we had already been speaking about. I recognize that the member may want to take us a little off track and

talk about other things, but I would encourage him to go to the human resources committee where this is being discussed at length by the committee, as well as by numerous officials. He may want to speak to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour, as well. She would be happy to take any of his comments.

• (1615)

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Dion, you have a few seconds left.

[English]

Hon. Stéphane Dion: If we believe the statutory interpretation, we assume the intention of legislators when they change the wording of a law is to change its meaning. You removed the words "reproductive system" from the definition. You are changing the meaning.

Minister, I urge you to look at this file and to convince your government to not make this change. You have been unable to give one reason to do so.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Dion.

Ms. Crockatt, you now have the floor for five minutes.

[English]

Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC): I would like to take a moment at the outset to correct the record.

Ms. Mathysen said it was March 2012 since the minister had appeared before this committee. She was not on the committee this year, and she might have received inaccurate information. In fact, Minister Ambrose did appear before this committee in the spring, on Bill S-2. I just wanted to note that.

Minister, thank you so much for being with us today.

You are a role model for women. When we're talking about women and their full participation in the economic, social, and democratic fabric of Canada, I can't think of anybody who would show them it's possible more than you. You're a pediatric surgeon. You have your M.B.A. You've been a leader in the health care field. You've been a really busy parliamentarian. Now, as the minister, I know you are and will be a very strong champion of girls' and women's rights. Thank you for being here.

I want to ask you about women's participation in the workforce, particularly in the skilled trades. I'm sure you are well aware that women are 47.5% of the Canadian workforce, but they're under-represented in skilled trades and science and technology. These tend to be higher paying jobs. They hold only 11.8% of construction jobs; 19% of forestry, fishing, mining, and oil and gas jobs; and 30% of agriculture jobs.

I was shocked, for example, to go up to Fort McMurray and find out that women are the most adept at operating those big, huge, and very expensive trucks.

In many cases, I think women don't look to those occupations that can lift them out of lower paying jobs. I'm wondering if you can tell us how Status of Women is working to encourage and promote women in these higher paying skilled trades.

Hon. Kellie Leitch: Thank you very much for the question.

I have to say that Kara Flynn, who is the human resources director at Syncrude, is very proud of the women who run those large dump trucks. One of the reasons that over 50% of the drivers at Syncrude are women is they take better care of the equipment. It's a win-win for Syncrude Canada as well as for industry leaders to know that if they hire women who are taking on these skilled professional trades that we are encouraging them to take on, there is an economic opportunity for them of not only having great workers who are diligent and show up to work on time, but they take care of the equipment.

With respect to encouraging women to enter into skilled professional trades and other areas, I will mention a few things. One is that the Government of Canada has been very focused on a number of programs to aid all Canadians, which women will also benefit from. First is the Canada job grant, an excellent opportunity to allow employers to know where the jobs are, know where they are available, to be able to invest and make sure that Canadian women are receiving the skills they need for those jobs that are available today.

In addition, the youth employment strategy has multiple facets to it that help develop skills for Canadians at different levels. Whether it be the career focus program, which targets post-secondary education students, the skills link program, which is for individuals mainly with a high school education who may need further education or skills training, or the summer jobs program which provides experience, all of these are available to younger Canadians. Many young women take full advantage of them.

As you are probably aware, since the early 1990s more than 61% of the graduates from post-secondary education institutions in this country have been women. What we need to do is not only encourage them to enter into university but also to enter into college. As you mentioned, the numbers speak for themselves. Not as many women are entering into professional trades or graduating. We're encouraging young Canadians to graduate, to complete their apprenticeships by providing incentive grants as well as completion grants, something which has been exceptionally popular across the country since being put in place.

At Status of Women Canada we also have a focus. We had our recent call for proposals on our economic security side, one of which is a program that I'll highlight because it focuses on women entrepreneurs. WEConnect Canada received over half a million dollars for a 30-month project to reduce the systemic barriers leading to under-representation of women-led businesses in the supply chains for Canadian corporations.

This program will aid women leaders from across the country to diversify their supply chain and develop their businesses. It provides mentorship. It provides opportunities for partnering. These are fabulous opportunities for women, and fabulous opportunities for other women because we know women hire women. We know that women invest in their communities when they are leading companies.

These are all positive things for women, by increasing the number of jobs available to them and to their local communities.

• (1620)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much. Five minutes goes by quickly.

Mrs. Sellah, you now have the floor.

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Thank you Madam Chair.

First of all, I would like to thank the minister for her first appearance before the committee. I am also new to this committee. I would also like to thank those who are accompanying the minister here today.

In order to be efficient and precise, Minister, I would ask you to answer briefly and concisely please, so that I may ask other questions.

[English]

You recently stated to the media that even in cases of rape as an act of war and forced child marriage, Canada will not give foreign aid to the organizations that perform or refer women to abortion services.

Abortion is legal in Canada, so I would like to ask you why the government has made this singular exemption around abortion services.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Sorry, Madam Chair, on a point of order again, I'm not sure what that has to do with supplementary estimates (B) or status of women issues that we do here at committee.

[Translation]

The Chair: Given that the minister is here, I will allow her to answer this question.

[English]

Hon. Kellie Leitch: With respect to forced child marriages—

The Chair: Madam Crockatt.

Ms. Joan Crockatt: When there is a point of order like that, Madam Chair, should you not take debate on it? It seems to me that the questions here are going wildly off what we're here to discuss today. I would like an opportunity to be able to address that before we throw everything but the kitchen sink in here.

• (1625)

[Translation]

The Chair: I would ask the minister to please give a brief answer. Then we will move on to another question.

Thank you.

[English]

Hon. Kellie Leitch: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

With respect to forced child marriages, and I mentioned this in my comments, today an estimated one in three girls in the developed world is married before the age of 18. This practice, in my opinion, and I think others, denies girls their rights to an education, to health care services, and to future opportunities.

I want to be very clear. Canada is committed to taking a leadership role with respect to this issue. I stated that at the United Nations when I was there in October. We will continue to find ways to partner with others across the globe in order to combat this. I want to be very clear, and I'll state again what I stated in my notes, that when I was at the United Nations in New York on October 11 for International Day of the Girl Child, I was very pleased to formally announce that Canada is working with other partner countries to pursue the first-ever stand-alone resolution on child, early, forced marriages. This will be put forward by Canada at the UN General Assembly later this year.

Our government has taken a leadership role in addressing health challenges faced by women, newborns, and children in the world's poorest countries. Our government has been very focused on attaining real results. By focusing on areas where Canada is a world leader, we have put forward, and our Prime Minister put forward, the Muskoka initiative.

Now, as a physician, I'll be very clear. Interventions on pre- and postpartum care—I'm not sure if the member wants to hear this—are exceptionally important. She would know as a family physician, as I do as a pediatric surgeon, that these are life-saving acts. When you're standing in an emergency department, when you are standing in a circumstance where you could have sterile instruments but you don't, you know what the risks are to that child. I can tell you that my preference is always to be in a safe and controlled environment, which is what we are creating, and that's what Canadians—

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Thank you, Minister.

[English]

Hon. Kellie Leitch: You asked me the question, and I'm answering your question. Please do not interrupt.

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Minister, I had asked you to be clear and precise because I have more questions. You still have not answered my question. I wanted to know why your government refuses access to abortion services. You know very well that in these countries rape and forced marriage are weapons of war. How can you then go before the United Nations and claim that you will cooperate internationally to defend these causes, while your government refuses these girls abortion services?

Please give us a short and clear answer.

[English]

Hon. Kellie Leitch: Well, as I was saying, I don't think any Canadian condones this abhorrent behaviour. Our government has made a choice to be very focused on what we can do to have real results. I can tell you, as a physician—and I'm sure this physician knows as well—that investments in pre- and postpartum care are essential to making sure we save lives. Our initiatives—and they're something Canadians can be exceptionally proud of—have prevented over 1.3 million child deaths from prematurity, prevented deaths of over 64,000 mothers, and enabled over 12 million couples to access important health care resources. These are things that Canadians should be very proud of. I know that I am proud of them.

On the issue of forced, early, child marriage Canadians should be proud that we are moving forward with respect to our resolution at the United Nations regarding this unacceptable behaviour. I'm sure Canadians agree with our government that moving forward on this resolution is exceptionally important, when young women are put in a position where they have to be married at an earlier age. As I mentioned before, the statistics are staggering. One in three girls in developing countries being married before the age of 18 puts them in a circumstance where they are not able to receive adequate education or health care services.

Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Chair: Minister, I thank you for appearing before our committee. We are going to break momentarily to allow you to leave the room. Thank you to all the participants for being here.

We will reconvene and hear from Ms. Clément, Ms. Tremblay and Mr. Goupil.

• (1630)

[English]

Hon. Kellie Leitch: Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1630)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1635)

[Translation]

The Chair: We will now resume our hearing.

If you are in agreement, I propose that each person have a five-minute question and answer period to allow more people to ask questions.

[English]

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Not really, because we have our order of questions: seven minutes, seven, seven, seven, seven, and five. I think we should just leave it in the order that we have it.

[Translation]

The Chair: All right.

Ms. Ambler, you have the floor for seven minutes.

[English]

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, departmental officials, for being here today. Already it has been a very interesting meeting. I really appreciate your time. I'm sure it takes quite a bit to prepare for these appearances, so thank you for that too.

I wanted to ask about women on boards in particular and what Status of Women Canada is doing in this area. Canadian women have high levels of education and business experience and represent more than 50% of university graduates, but female CEOs lead just 2% of the world's largest companies and are represented only on 10% of boards.

We are all aware that this is an issue and it's sometimes hard to reconcile that fact with the fact that there are so many women entrepreneurs who lead successful businesses and are active in so many areas of community life but for some reason are consistently under-represented on boards.

The minister in the first hour mentioned the WEConnect Canada organization. I had the pleasure of attending their conference in Toronto a few weeks ago. I met a number of successful women entrepreneurs and took part in a panel with representatives and people who have benefited from the expertise of an organization like WEConnect Canada. First of all, let me congratulate Status of Women Canada and the minister in her absence for funding this organization, because I do believe that we have to have mentoring programs and training grounds for women so that they have the qualifications to serve on these corporate boards.

You are probably aware that some governments in some countries around the world have tried the quota system for solving this problem. I can understand where that comes from, where the desire to fix the problem quickly comes from, because it just seems fundamentally unjust, right? How can this be? Women are obviously qualified to do this, so why are the numbers so low?

Models like the one in Norway, Women on Boards, seem to have largely backfired. I'm hoping to be reassured that our model for getting more women to serve on corporate boards is better. I'm also hoping that you can reassure me that we have a plan. My colleague from Calgary Centre told me about a recent study. It came out yesterday and will be published in the *Journal of Corporate Finance*. Professor Li from the University of British Columbia released a study that shows that when there are women on corporate boards, they are more successful in mergers and acquisitions. I read a little bit about the study and found that they are attributing it to the fact that sociological studies show that women don't overestimate their abilities as much as men do—sorry about that, Terence—and that people on corporate boards are confident and self-aware, but women in particular are more cautious.

I thought that was pertinent to the conversation. I'll stop talking so you can tell me what Status of Women Canada is doing about the issue of the representation of women on boards.

• (1640)

Mr. Sébastien Goupil (Director General, Policy and External Relations, Status of Women Canada): Thanks for the question. I think it's a very important file.

The first thing we do is support the minister with our advisory council for participation of women on boards. This is an advisory council that was announced through economic action plan 2012. There have already been two meetings of the advisory council. They were asked to provide advice on how industry can increase representation on corporate boards. It suggests how the industry and government can better track and report on results. This is a very critical aspect of the issue, looking at how we monitor progress. Also, they were asked to make recommendations on how governments can recognize those who are making progress, taking action, and committing.

Apart from supporting the minister on this important government priority, we've played a very proactive role in engaging our federal,

provincial and territorial forum on this issue. I'd like to mention two key initiatives in particular that we've supported over the past year in collaboration and partnership with the provinces and territories.

The first one is that we organize a very important knowledge exchange event on the issue. One of the goals, and this is something that was discussed across jurisdictions, is that people want to make sure we're all complementing one another, that we're advancing in the same direction, sharing a common understanding of what the issue is all about, what the business case is all about, and who the key stakeholders are who have to be mobilized. This was the type of discussion that we addressed.

Another important thing that was done was that we commissioned, through the FPT forum and the Conference Board of Canada, to develop a very snappy document that I recommend you all have a look at. We can send it to the clerk of the committee. It's on the business case for why it is important to have more women on boards.

There's been lots of research done on this file. I think the business case is well-informed, but we wanted to have something very snappy that could be shared with the leaders in the business community so they understand that it's in their interests to advance on this front.

We continue to support the minister, as I mentioned, but also to find ways to collaborate with the provinces and territories on moving forward on this important file. We take the pulse of what other jurisdictions are doing to inform the way forward.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Goupil. I would ask that you please send the link to that document to the committee clerk.

Thank you, Ms. Ambler.

Ms. Papillon, you now have the floor for seven minutes.

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Madam Chair, following the minister's appearance before the committee, I would first like to say that I am in shock after hearing that she thinks that the Standing Committee on the Status of Women has nothing to do with the issues of abortion, forced early marriages or the definition of reproductive organs.

I find it very disturbing that she thinks that this committee should not be raising or addressing these issues. Quite honestly, we did not get any answers to our questions. That's appalling. We are here as legislators and we should be able to explain the changes. If the minister cannot even explain the changes made to legislation, then I think they are not appropriate changes.

That being said, I would like to ask Mr. Goupil a question.

Did Status of Women Canada measure the success of their departmental action plan on gender-based analysis following the Auditor General's 2009 audit?

●(1645)

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: I imagine that this question is for me again.

We are currently working on implementing the departmental action plan on gender-based analysis. Concerning the measurement of results, I would like to talk to you about the progress we have made in gender-based analysis, or GBA. Since the plan was implemented in 2010-2011, we have mobilized 25 departments and agencies to develop GBA frameworks so that they can make these practices viable.

We should not lose sight of the fact that the role of Status of Women Canada is to help federal institutions develop expertise in this area. We support federal institutions with knowledge-based tools. We have developed a platform, among other things. We have modernized our tools and developed the first interactive online course on gender-based analysis and made it universally accessible. This course is accessible to federal public servants, but also to the public, to allow everyone to be involved.

There are several federal institutions. Departments may intervene in many different fields and they have varied expertise. We wanted to help them in the broadest way possible. Since the course was implemented, we have trained more than 800 public servants working in 41 organizations. Those are the most recent data.

Since we started working on gender-based analysis, this is the first time we have left the social domain. For years, it was easier to get socially-oriented departments to contribute. Several departments participated in the plan's first two implementation phases. In the last year, we have worked extensively with organizations that had not necessarily developed the habit of thinking about gender and diversity. We work with scientific organizations, public safety organizations, and other organizations to help us with this.

We are also working hard to mobilize those at the top of the public service to participate in GBA. We are doing so in different ways because we want to ensure that all departments participate. Over the last two years, we have created a new week to raise awareness about gender-based analysis. We were very proud that the Clerk of the Privy Council commented on the importance of this tool when making decisions.

There has been a lot of progress in the field. There are several subjects where gender-based analysis is being discussed. I would like to mention some of the departments that have shown best practices in this area. The Public Health Agency of Canada has trained nearly 100 people, which is a large percentage of its staff. That agency has applied GBA to many subjects, including AIDS, wait times, cardiovascular disease, etc.

The Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, which is now called Employment and Social Development Canada—ESDC—has done the same thing. It has applied GBA to some of its programs, for example its program for aboriginals and its programs for seniors. The Department of Natural Resources is also making substantial efforts to apply GBA. Last week, we organized an important event with that department about considering gender in the context of technological failings, in order to see how gender could be a factor in promoting innovation.

●(1650)

Ms. Annick Papillon: You say that you have made a lot of progress, but could you provide us with what you have said about this progress in writing?

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: I would be happy to.

Ms. Annick Papillon: Is there a deadline to see the results of this analysis? You said that it is a work in progress...

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: I think there is some misunderstanding about gender-based analysis. It is an analytical process used to look at various files. It can be applied to research projects or to...

Ms. Annick Papillon: When will we see the next situation update report?

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: Pardon?

Ms. Annick Papillon: When exactly will we see the next update report on what you are doing?

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: I do not have an answer on a report. Bear in mind that using gender-based analysis is an iterative process. It is used to develop federal government programming, legislation and policies.

The progress that we have noted is in the way in which the policies are evolving. What I mean is that many federal organizations that we work with take this matter very seriously and are doing very serious work on the ground.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Goupil.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Young for seven minutes.

[English]

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

First I would like to say something for the record. I don't think any men in business ever overestimate their abilities. That sounds wildly fictitious.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Terence Young: I wanted to say that for the record. Perhaps I'm wrong, but I don't know.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Perhaps—

Mr. Terence Young: I just thought I should defend the men.

The Chair: Somebody had to.

Mr. Terence Young: Thank you to the officials for being here today.

Part of the mission of Status of Women Canada is to help educate the public about the issues facing women and girls in this country. Could you please inform the committee of the public resources that you provide in order to achieve this goal? If this could be a long answer, that would be helpful: the resources you provide, where they can be found, and how Canadians and those of us in Parliament can make use of them.

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: I can start, and I'll let my colleague complete it if she wants to.

We try to make our resources available through our website. I just mentioned the course on gender-based analysis. One of the goals was to make it universally accessible so that it can be used not only by federal officials, but also by NGOs and colleagues from the provinces and territories. It's a well-designed bilingual product available on the website. As well, there are other key documents that inform the practice of gender-based analysis.

Mr. Terence Young: Would that be available to high school students, for example?

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: It would be accessible. I think that as a practice it would be geared more to university students interested in this type of analysis, but yes, it's on the Status of Women Canada website.

The minister mentioned this when she appeared, but we've developed a website that addresses the issue of violence against women and girls. That provides a different type of information on the issue and its impact, on where people can go for support, and on how various groups, parents, friends, and family can help.

Over the years we've developed a number of issues briefs. One that is important, as I think there haven't been many, is a brief around those issues of engaging men and boys. It's available on the website.

Mr. Terence Young: That's very interesting to me. You mean that it's available to men and boys and it's available to anyone. Is there a section that discusses that or leads to that? Is there a section that says if you're a male student, this is where you can learn or...?

• (1655)

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: Are you talking about the website?

Mr. Terence Young: Yes.

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: Yes. Different types of information are available for different target groups, so if you're a coach, there's information on the website that you can access.

Apart from these, over the years we've supported very important data-gathering projects. We know that in order to support the practice of gender-based analysis, having the right type of sex-disaggregated data is instrumental. We've had a chance to talk here about women in Canada. We've also developed, in collaboration with our provincial and territorial counterparts, a compendium called "Measuring violence against women: Statistical trends", which looks at different types of indicators on the issue of violence against women.

In support of the work we've done on establishing the International Day of the Girl Child, there also has been an issues brief on issues facing girls in Canada, in order to inform some of the thinking and the policy development moving forward.

Ms. Linda Savoie (Director General, Women's Program and Regional Operations Directorate, Status of Women Canada): In terms of possibly some other angles, when it comes to women in non-traditional employment, we've put a lot of focus on public education on that specific topic this year. For instance, we had a series of YouTube videos during Women's History Month profiling women in non-traditional employment. We use a very broad range of mechanisms to get the information out there.

Another mechanism we use, for instance, is through the funding of projects to groups. We will at times be developing resources with these groups. I'll give you an example. We're funding the Canadian Red Cross to develop online modules to promote healthy and respectful relationships among teens, the ultimate role obviously being to reduce violence against young girls. These modules that we're funding the Red Cross to develop are also part of the publicly available documents and tools.

There is a very broad range of tools that we use. We use the opportunities given to us by commemorative events such as International Women's Day and the International Day of the Girl Child. We use these events to promote the issues that are important to our mandate.

I hope this gives you a flavour of what we do. I wouldn't say by any extent that this is exhaustive, but it gives you a flavour.

Mr. Terence Young: Do you have any resources for our community colleges or universities, for example, to assist them in attracting women into either non-traditional apprenticeship work or trades?

Ms. Linda Savoie: Not specifically. That tends to be with the responsibility that lies with our provincial colleagues. We do fund a number of projects that will identify the barriers to the interest and entry of young girls into these types of employment.

Mr. Terence Young: With regard to sexual assault, do you do anything with the colleges and universities?

We have a great college system and university system in Ontario, but all the events seem to be around alcohol. Everything's in the pub and everything is about drinking beer and stuff. That's when a lot of the sexual assaults happen, when there's been a lot of consumption of alcohol. Is there anything that they've asked your support for? Do you have any communication planned on helping to reduce sexual assaults that happen when people are drunk?

Ms. Linda Savoie: What we have is actually a little bit broader. What we did two years ago is launch a call for proposals so that campus communities across the country, whether they're colleges or universities, could approach us with projects that would allow them to explore what the risks are to young women currently, and what the possible measures are to implement, to increase the safety of these women on the campuses.

Of course, there are over 20 of these projects going on currently that we're funding. They are exploring a number of strategies. Some focus on physical safety. Some focus on dating safety. Some focus, as you were just mentioning, on personal safety when in an environment where there's a lot of alcohol being consumed. All these projects are going to generate a number of tools that again are helping campuses across the country deal with this issue.

• (1700)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Savoie and Mr. Young.

Mr. Dion, you have the floor. You have seven minutes.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank Mr. Goupil, Ms. Tremblay and Ms. Savoie for being with us today. I am happy to be here too.

I would like to go back to the advisory council set up by the previous minister, Ms. Ambrose, for gender representation on corporate boards. The council—and we discussed it earlier—was supposed to report back in the fall. Am I to understand that it will take longer than expected to publish the report?

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: That is correct.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Do you have any idea when the report will be ready?

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: It is difficult for me to speak to that. In my view, the minister should answer the question. Our role, at Status of Women Canada, is to support the minister and her advisory council. So I cannot comment on the matter.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: How many times has the council met?

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: It has met twice.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: There have been two meetings, but over what time period?

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: That information is already public. There was a meeting in June and another one in October.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Do you think that is a good frequency?

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: Considering the make-up of the council and the people that it represents—these are very busy people—I think there is a real commitment to offer the best advice and the best support possible. There again, I cannot comment on a question of that nature.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I apologize, I am not a member of this committee, but based on the description of what is expected from these people, I would like to know if there are any parameters that will allow us to anticipate the type of recommendations that will be submitted.

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: I will go back to three of the points the advisory council has examined. One deals mainly with advice on how Canadian industry and corporations can increase the representation of women on boards. Bear in mind that various sectors of the Canadian economy are represented.

As you undoubtedly know, Mr. Dion, not all sectors are at the same point. Look at, for example, the mining and gas sectors compared to the banking sector. That requires some thought and discussions. Commitments need to be made.

It is also important for this council to look at how to measure progress and to account for it in a Canadian context. Lastly, they must determine how leaders who commit to and advance the file can be recognized. These are the three main areas that the advisory council has examined.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Goupil, while the council does its work, Parliament also does its own.

Can you assure us that the council members know when a bill is tabled by one of our colleagues? I don't remember who it was, but we will get you the information. There is also Senator Hervieux-Payette's bill that has been around for a long time.

Does the work of parliamentarians get to the council?

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: It would not be appropriate for me to talk about the council's discussions...

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I was simply wondering if...

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: ... but I believe they generally take note of work that has been done. Not everyone believes that laws are the most effective means. This is an issue of international debate. Studies have shown that regardless of the use of laws and implementation of strategies, what's important and what gives results is the level of commitment and the resulting plan.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I would be surprised if international experiences were being taken into account rather than the Parliament of Canada's own discussions. I suggest that you make sure that the council is well aware of the debates of Canadian parliamentarians.

You are passionate about what you do and that is very important for Canada. That said, I would like to talk about performance evaluation.

The evaluation states that you work to a great extent through various organizations, in other words you subsidize these organizations for a time, often for the short term. From what I read in the evaluation report, it was often difficult to undertake quantitative evaluations.

Have you thought about how you can make sure that we, as taxpayers, are getting value for money, and how you can identify what is working and what is not working quite as well? I am talking about concrete results in terms of public interest goals.

• (1705)

Ms. Linda Savoie: In terms of funding for groups and evaluation of results, the most recent program evaluation took place two years ago. It dealt with the 2006 to 2010 period.

At that time, the department had a slightly different approach in terms of calls for proposals. At the time, we would tend to wait until we were presented with the material. That caused enormous problems when we attempted to identify trends and measure results. As you pointed out, the evaluation clearly shows that. There are signs of success in terms of the assistance we are providing to create partnerships. The scope of the program is good and there is great demand for it. However, there are certainly shortcomings.

Our work over the past three years will better support the next program evaluation in 2017. We have changed our approach and we now do targeted tendering twice a year. This will provide us with a sampling of similar projects throughout the country, using the same recipe or different recipes, but with the same theme. That will allow us to identify the truly successful recipes, what is working and what is giving better outcomes. We hope that our current approach will provide us with more rigorous quantitative results. In terms of qualitative results, all is proceeding relatively well.

The Chair: Thank you. Unfortunately that is all the time you have. Thank you very much for those answers.

I will now ask Ms. Young to take the floor. You have five minutes.

[English]

Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC): Thank you very much.

I want to thank the officials very much for coming here today.

I would like to follow up on the current discussion around the allocation of funds, because we are here today to talk about estimates and budgets, etc. I would ask you to continue outlining to us how the projects are vetted, selected, and monitored. How do you monitor for outcomes and the best use of government funding? If we have time, I'll have some subsequent questions as well.

Ms. Linda Savoie: Starting with the selection of projects, as you're probably aware, we do our calls for proposals through our website. Our calls describe very specifically the types of projects we're looking for, and what the key results are that need to be achieved.

Ms. Wai Young: That changed, as you just said, a couple of years ago.

Can you explain why that changed?

Ms. Linda Savoie: We were seeking an approach that would give us more comparable data so that we could identify what works and what is maybe not quite as successful.

Ms. Wai Young: Does that imply that prior to that, you did not have the kind of framework or structure in place to adequately quantify projects to give you the desired outcomes?

Ms. Linda Savoie: I would say that we had very solid, qualitative data, good indications of what works, but we were not as solid in establishing the proof, establishing a chain of results. Sometimes it was more difficult for us to establish that it was our intervention that caused something to happen. We're hoping now that by building more rigour into the process and having a logic model for each of these projects and key results that need to be achieved, we'll be able to capture more easily what works and what doesn't work. More important, we will share that back to the communities so that groups that have an interest in this subject matter across the country can access what works and what doesn't work, and not reinvent the wheel locally, with futility at times.

• (1710)

Ms. Wai Young: Are you saying that you're more confident with your logic model and the new changes that you've implemented, that you are now able to document and qualify that the program funding was successful and able to distribute the results of that across Canada?

Ms. Linda Savoie: I'm very confident that we're going to have very good data—

Ms. Wai Young: That's good.

Ms. Linda Savoie: —and we will be able to identify what works best, what works in certain circumstances, and what works in limited circumstances. Not every evaluation will show that everything works for a given situation, but it will hopefully allow us to identify the success factors for where it should be used as a recipe. That's our broader evaluation strategy.

Also, we have a strategy whereby each project, once it's selected, has interim reporting and final close-outs that have to be submitted. We are able to assess each and every project, how successful they were at meeting the key results. We then look at the projects within a stream. Now we're able to start doing that because we launched this approach of calls for proposals, a directive for calls for proposals, nearly three years ago. We are getting the first batch of projects that are closing and we will be able to assess clusters of projects that were addressing a similar issue and learn lessons from that.

Every year we also look at all the projects that closed, either a sampling of them or the totality of them, depending on the interest for that specific year. We identify what results were achieved for that cluster of projects that have closed.

We do evaluations at a number of levels. Hopefully for us all the pieces fit together, and these give us a very good indication of where we should be tweaking and adjusting the program in its next iteration.

Ms. Wai Young: What does the department do in terms of disseminating the information or the learnings that are derived from the successful projects?

It sometimes occurs to me as I travel across Canada that it's such a shame some wildly successful and very effective programs are not shared across Canada with other groups, where they could have a dynamic effect.

Ms. Linda Savoie: What we've been exploring in recent years, for about two years, is when we select projects for funding, for instance, the campus projects.... We had some 22 or 24 projects that were selected for funding. We tried to create a community among the project proponents, where they would be put in contact by teleconference to share learnings. We could, at times, bring in an academic expert or an expert group to make a presentation to these groups so that collectively they share learnings.

Our hope is that they will become a community that will outlast us, so that once we're no longer there as a funder, the linkages we have created will continue and will allow these groups to share their experiences and save time and money, not reinvent things on an individual basis.

We do those types of things, connecting groups.

[Translation]

The Chair: On behalf of the committee members, I would like to sincerely thank you once again for having come today and for having provided us with detailed answers to our questions. If we have any more questions, I am sure that we will be able to call upon you. Once again, thank you very much.

We are now going to suspend the hearing for a few minutes in order to give our guests time to leave the room. We will then take a few minutes to discuss our next meeting and to adopt, or not, what we have just discussed.

• (1710)

(Pause)

• (1715)

The Chair: It is now time to follow up on the first part of our meeting.

HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Department

Vote 25b—Office of the Coordinator, Status of Women—Operating expenditures..... \$1,600,000

(Vote 25b carries.)

The Chair: Does the committee order the chair to report Supplementary Estimates (B) 2013-2014 to the House?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: This will be done before the December 5 deadline.

Now, in terms of our Thursday meeting, we have not yet had any confirmation from the witnesses, whether from Health Canada or from Status of Women Canada. The people from Status of Women Canada have told us that given their mandate, they do not see how they could contribute at this point in time to the study presented in our motion.

Furthermore, our analysts have begun some groundwork and have started preparing a briefing document on the topic of Mr. Young's motion. However, they have not been in a position to provide us with this document given that the subject matter is so broad.

Therefore, I would like to know what the committee's wishes are given that we do not have any witnesses for now and given that this is a study that we will probably begin in January.

I would also like to tell you that we will probably have the opportunity over the next two weeks to consider the report on sexual harassment. There will be three or four committee meetings on this starting next week.

I would now like to know what you think about our Thursday meeting.

Ms. Truppe, you have the floor.

[English]

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think the bells are ringing, but I just want to say that Ms. Ashton and I decided at our last meeting that we don't want to waste a meeting if we don't have to, and that we should fill it with witnesses.

We each gave five witnesses. I know the clerk is sick, but does that mean everything stops? I don't know how that works. With 15 witnesses, we should be able to get someone. I know Mr. Young has spoken to someone whose name he submitted, and he's quite willing to appear on Thursday.

I'm not sure, but what is the clerk doing about the witnesses, I guess would be my question.

[Translation]

The Chair: I believe that she has done some work on that. The problem has more to do with preparation time. It can be somewhat easier for witnesses from departments, for example, to be ready with a presentation. For witnesses coming from the outside, it could be a little more difficult because we do not necessarily have specific guidelines to give them with respect to the content of their presentations.

Mr. Young, you have the floor.

● (1720)

[English]

Mr. Terence Young: Thank you, Chair.

We have a plan. As far as I know you have 15 potential witnesses. I understand the clerk is off ill. That can happen, but does everything just stop? Has the clerk not made any calls to any of these people? Do we not know that?

I talked to some people saying that we're going to start on Thursday. I asked them last week if they would be available Tuesday and Thursday. One of them, a key witness, said he would make himself available. He's so excited that we're doing a study.

I don't even know at this point if anyone's called these people. My question is, what is going on?

[Translation]

The Chair: From what I understand, the committee appears to be agreeing on a Thursday meeting. We will make sure there are witnesses. We already have witnesses on standby from Health Canada.

Mr. Young, you mentioned a potential witness. I will tell the clerk this and we will make sure we have witnesses on Thursday.

Yes, Ms. Crockatt?

[English]

Ms. Joan Crockatt: Madam Chair, I'm surprised we're having this conversation because we had previously decided it would be starting on Thursday. We've sent our full witness list and they are ready to come, so there is no problem.

There is only the issue about the clerk. We should have a backup plan if the clerk is not available.

[Translation]

The Chair: We just need to determine whether or not witnesses are available for Thursday and make sure that they have enough time to prepare their presentations.

Are there any other questions or comments?

Mr. Young, you have the floor. We will then move on to Mrs. Sellah.

[English]

Mr. Terence Young: One of those witnesses is willing to appear on Thursday. When I spoke to him, I cautioned him that an opening statement would be great and that he should get it in a couple of days early for translation. That may not be possible now.

Would the committee members agree to a written statement in English only, under these circumstances?

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Young, in that case usually the witness can make their remarks. If the brief is not translated, we will not hand it out but we will make sure it is available in both official languages after it has been presented.

Mrs. Sellah, you have the floor.

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Thank you, Madam Chair.

If I understood you correctly, you said that Status of Women Canada does not have any witnesses who could appear for the purposes of this study?

The Chair: No, it was simply that for now they wanted to have a little more information on the kind of presentation they could do on the subject of the motion.

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Exactly. I think it would be quite relevant for them to present before us because usually that is how a committee works. We cannot simply hear witnesses at the last minute without there being studies or research based on authentic data.

I assume they noted that this did not fall under our committee's mandate, but rather that of the Standing Committee on Health.

The Chair: However, we can still invite them so that they can tell us what their mandate is and so that they have an opportunity to clarify that.

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: That is precisely why, to obtain some clarification.

The Chair: Then we agree to have a Thursday meeting with those witnesses that we discussed.

Thank you very much and have a good evening.

The meeting is adjourned.

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