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Chair

Ms. Marilyn Gladu

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)): As it's 3:30, I will call the meeting to order.

[Translation]

Good afternoon, everyone.

This afternoon's meeting is going to be special.

[English]

Today the Auditor General's representatives have come to speak to us about a GBA report, and in a short time I'll introduce them. That will be followed by a bit of committee business and then some discussion about estimates.

Without further ado, I would like to present to you Richard Domingue and Nancy Cheng.

Go ahead.

[Translation]

Ms. Nancy Cheng (Assistant Auditor General, Office of the Auditor General of Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss our 2015 fall report on gender-based analysis. Joining me at the table is Richard Domingue, principal, who was responsible for the audit.

Gender-based analysis is an analytical tool for assessing the gender-specific impacts of policies, legislation, and programs on women and men. This tool is intended to help policy-makers consider gender issues, and support decision making. Implementing gender-based analysis can help integrate social, economic, and gender differences into policy development.

[English]

At a United Nations conference in 1995, the Government of Canada committed to analyzing gender-specific policy impacts on women and men before making decisions. Our audit focused on the implementation of GBA, an area we examined in 2009. The audit included Status of Women Canada, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, the Privy Council Office, and four departments. At the time, they were known as Employment and Social Development Canada, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Industry Canada, and Natural Resources Canada. In our audit we selected and examined a total of 16 recent policy initiatives from the four departments.

[Translation]

In our 2015 audit, we observed that gender-based analysis was still not fully deployed across the federal government, although 20 years had passed since the government had committed to applying this type of analysis to its policy decisions. In other words, gender considerations, including obstacles to the full participation of diverse groups of women and men, are not always considered in government decisions. This finding is similar to what we found in our 2009 audit.

We also found in our 2015 audit that a gender-based analysis framework was not implemented in 6 of the 25 departments and agencies that had committed to implementing the 2009 government-wide departmental action plan on GBA.

[English]

We found that the analyses conducted by our sampled departments were not always complete, nor of consistent quality. A complete GBA was performed by the four departments for half the 16 sampled initiatives. Examining the family violence prevention program at Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, we found evidence that the completion of GBA contributed to program development.

We found that Status of Women Canada, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, and the Privy Council Office made progress in promoting and supporting the application of gender-based analysis in the federal government. For example, Status of Women Canada developed guidance documents, tools, and online training materials for departments and agencies. It also drafted a new GBA strategic plan. The secretariat and Privy Council Office clarified their expectations about what information on gender issues needed to be included in cabinet documents.

[Translation]

Despite all these efforts, departments and agencies face barriers to including gender-based analysis in policy development. These barriers can include the absence of mandatory requirements to conduct GBA, tight deadlines for developing policy initiatives, and limited review by senior management of the completeness of GBA.

[English]

The central agencies and Status of Women Canada have agreed with our recommendations and agreed to take actions to implement them.

Madam Chair, this concludes my opening remarks. We would be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have.

Thank you.

The Chair: That's excellent. Thank you again for being with us today.

We'll start the questions, beginning with the Liberals.

You'll have seven minutes. Ms. Damoff, do you want to coordinate this, or are there speakers identified?

Oh, we have Mr. Fraser to begin.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): First of all, thank you very much for coming here. I think this is an area of the committee's work that I'm excited to learn more about, and it seems from the Auditor General's report that it's an area in which there could be significant growth.

One thing I've noticed through your opening remarks and in reading some briefing documents as well is that the focus seems to be on gender-based analysis. Status of Women Canada recommends the implementation of a GBA+ methodology that considers potential other intersecting grounds of discrimination—race, geography, a number of different factors.

Was any attention given to a GBA+ analysis during the Auditor General's exercise?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: Thank you for the question.

The audit focused on reviewing progress in implementing GBA broadly across government as well as on looking at a sample of four departments. When we looked at broad-based implementation, we were looking to see whether the GBA or GBA+ methodology that you referred to was implemented. We did not actually look at the details to say whether they paid particular attention to some of the elements you referred to, be it age or ethnicity of the women's group within that department.

● (1535)

Mr. Sean Fraser: To take it one step further, are there plans in the works to do further work through the Auditor General's office whereby there would be potential to implement an analysis that considers the GBA+ framework?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: At present we do not have specific plans to do further work in the GBA area. We did an audit in 2009. This is a follow-up effort to see whether progress has been made and whether there has been some development and whether there might be issues we would continue to have to draw attention to so that improvements can be made. Rather than conduct further work in this area at the moment, it might be considered a number of years from now to see what movement may have been made.

At the present moment there are no specific plans to do further work.

Mr. Sean Fraser: With the work that has been done, I notice that the central agencies and Status of Women Canada indicated there has been progress. Can you describe in a little greater detail what the nature of that progress has been and what the groups are doing that's working?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: There is a description within the chapter that talks to the progress that has been made. Much of it is actually within the central agencies' areas. In the case of Status of Women, there has been development of the framework itself, for example, the GBA+ framework. They also provide training and tools.

We can get the reference for you. The section that talks about central agencies as well as Status of Women helping to promote and support gender-based analysis is on page 13. You'll see that in paragraph 1.42 we highlight the overall finding, and then starting from paragraph 1.46 we describe some of the work they've done.

More specifically for Status of Women, on page 14 at the end of paragraph 1.48 we highlighted a few bullets of activities. In this section we talk about developing, promoting, and giving awareness sessions, and providing tailored training for GBA analysis to help people understand and launch the GBA+ framework that we talked about, and also about maintaining some web-based training so that departments and agencies can have access to it.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Okay, thank you very much. Being cognizant that I'm not the only one at the table, I'd be happy to share the rest of my seven minutes.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you.

When I read your report, I have to say I was somewhat saddened by the fact that this has been talked about for so long and that it seems to be so slow being implemented within departments.

Being cognizant of “government speak”, I'm wondering whether you think it would be helpful.... I didn't know what GBA was. I think it's a term that's difficult to put your head around. Someone described it to me as the military having a tool kit that fits on a belt and the belt doesn't fit the woman, so they need to look at perhaps doing something differently.

Do you think part of the issue is that people don't understand what it is and the importance of doing it? You've highlighted some really great success stories, but there are certainly more failures than there are successes, it seems. Do you think part of it is not understanding what it is and the benefit of doing it?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: We're talking to the progress being made by the Status of Women, and they have to continue to do more. They're the body that can help. It's the centre of excellence and they can help people be sensitized to better understand what it means. What does it mean when we say we need to do a GBA analysis when we look at a new policy or a policy renewal? In essence, they ask some fundamental questions. Stepping back, does the program you're proposing affect men and women differently? If so, in what way? Have you got the input? Are there things you have to do with your policy instruments to accommodate?

They have to be able to help people understand that. From Status of Women's perspective, it is really providing the tool kit, the sensitization, and the training to help people and support them to do that.

Having said that, other central agencies like the Treasury Board Secretariat and the Privy Council Office look at Treasury Board submissions and they also look at cabinet submissions and memos to cabinet. They're the ones who have to call them on it and ask, "Have you looked at that? Does the submission contain enough information to show that you have sufficiently considered the issues?"

Collectively they have a base to help departments and agencies consider the gender aspect when they consider policy changes.

• (1540)

Ms. Pam Damoff: There seems to be some hesitancy to get it into the common knowledge so that everyone is thinking about it. I think there seems to be a bit of a disconnect there. We're not getting everyone thinking about it. It's only in certain areas.

Ms. Nancy Cheng: It certainly can be one of the elements that should be identified that needs to be overcome. We were struggling with the same result statement as well for part of the audit, Madam Chair. We did an audit in 2009, and when you look at the UN commitment that was made way back, there's been a lot of talk about gender equality. How are we translating an international commitment into action? We were taken aback as well in terms of the limited progress that has been made in this day and age, even from those who said they would sign up to implement the framework. A good number of them, six—that's working out to almost one in four—didn't have the framework in place. Then those that did haven't always done the analysis for the initiative properly.

What are some of the problems associated with it? We tried to lay down a few points for the government to consider. They should sit back and ask how come it's taking so long. Maybe they can look at some of the elements that the member referred to, maybe some of the suggestions we have highlighted in our report, and ask, if these are the impediments, what would be a meaningful way to overcome them? What's doable and what's not doable? Have a conversation and then move forward on this file.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move over to our Conservative colleague, Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you.

In the report, it stated that six out of 25 departments that committed to implement GBA did not implement a framework at all. Of the 19 remaining departments, how did the Auditor General choose the four that were examined in the report, and what will be done concerning the 15 departments that remain unexamined?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: We selected four departments. They would be listed under the focus of the audit and that would be on page 2. We indicated that the first two departments were selected because they were originally looked at when we did our 2009 report, so it's a revisit to see whether things have changed. The other two were selected because they signed on after our audit.

During the period of 2009-13, 25 departments formally committed and said they would implement GBA. This is further to a departmental action plan that the government has published. The government said they would do something about GBA, and individual departments signed up and said they would now do this as part of their policy development process.

So 25 signed up and we selected two that were originally looked at and two that were recently signed up. Industry Canada signed up in 2010-11, and Natural Resources Canada signed up more recently in 2012-13.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That's fantastic. Out of this study, what can the status of women committee do to ensure that all government departments are applying the GBA to inform government decisions?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: We suggest that the committee consider some of our recommendations. We often encourage departments to provide a management action plan resulting from our recommendations. In other words, the auditors saw that certain things might be an issue and identified a way forward through a recommendation. What is the department doing about that? They provide a response to say they agree or disagree, but then they also have to flesh it out to say that if they agree, what they are going to do about it.

It may be helpful to ask for that management action plan, and through that the committee could write a report to government and ask the government to state its position as to whether it's going to do certain things formally.

If you look at the report, there have been hearings on the 2009 audit, both by the status of women committee as well as the public accounts committee. Both have supported the recommendations in the Auditor General's report. Hence we saw the 2009 departmental action plan, which is a response by the government of the day saying they would do something, and that's what paved the way for the GBA+ framework and some of the progress at the central agencies. Actual implementation on the ground has been spotty.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Okay, could the Auditor General suggest a timeline or a specific means, in co-operation, to ensure that there's proper implementation of the GBA?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: It really depends on the urgency of the issue as seen by the committee and the government of the day.

Should this be done? Well, it's been 20 years, so arguably it should be done fairly soon. That being said, would it be the top priority of the country? That's not for the auditors to call. That's for the government to have a view on.

If you feel this is really an urgent issue, I think the government should be taken to task to do something now. If you feel it is important but you want to give it a reasonable time frame, that's again for you to consider and recommend or ask the government to undertake.

• (1545)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Do you see any barriers to departments implementing GBA? Do you see any barriers that would make you say this might not work because of this? Are their stumbling blocks we can work our way across?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: We highlighted a few potential barriers in paragraph 1.58, on page 16. There we indicated that it is a commitment, but it is just a commitment. There is no government directive or policy that requires it to be done. In other words, when we go to a department and do an audit, if they didn't do it, then they didn't honour a commitment, and that's the extent of it.

If there was non-compliance with the law, that would be very serious, whereas if there was non-compliance with a government directive or policy, they would get a “non-compliant” kind of observation from us. This is not a non-compliance kind of thing, because there is no real requirement to do so. There's no mandatory need to actually have that done, so that might be one of the elements.

The other thing we observed is that sometimes they are working under very tight timelines. The public servants often work under very extreme timelines in terms of being able to move forward with a policy consideration.

When you look at what they have to do, there's also some sort of analysis that they have to get done. This is just one thing. They may not actually have time to do so, and in fact in one of the cases, we noticed that they completed the GBA analysis after they had made all the policy decisions. They just made sure they had completed the due diligence required and did not really have time to consider it and fully integrate it into the policy decisions themselves.

Finally, it speaks to the point that another member raised earlier, which was the capacity within the departments themselves and whether they fully understand what the analysis entails. It's not just checking a box. It's about them asking what they are trying to do and what they are hoping to accomplish. Do they understand the data source they have to gather? Who do they have to consult and how do they analyze the results of that? If there is an issue, what are they supposed to do about that?

For all those aspects, they need to be supported by Status of Women, which is the centre of expertise to help them.

The staff has to do the right thing. Then there needs to be a review by senior management. If senior management doesn't ask as much of it or doesn't challenge it as much, then it becomes a weaker part of the submission and the analysis.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: You probably can't make suggestions to us, but in a perfect world, would your suggestions be that if we're looking at having GBA, to make it mandatory for our committee then to put through a policy for the government to make this a mandatory thing for all departments? Then we could move forward with GBA across all departments to make sure it is implemented and to have timelines and time frames for that.

Ms. Nancy Cheng: It is good to clarify what we do and what we don't do.

Auditors bring observations to the table. We do not propose government policy or negate government policy. It is very important that we keep that independence and objectivity from the government machinery.

However, that being said, if you are going to require people to do it a mandatory way, it will help the cause. If you look strictly at the

cause and the result, if there were a requirement, it would definitely not hold things back but rather would move things forward.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Given your expertise, do you believe that making this mandatory would fix that? Or do you believe that we must continue to encourage and engage the departments to move into 2016 and understand that GBA is necessary?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: From our perspective, it's just one of many elements that need to be considered. Part of it might be that departments and agencies want to do the right thing, but they just don't know how to broach it as well.

Just basically laying down a law to say you have to do it would not totally resolve the problem.

• (1550)

The Chair: We'll now turn to my NDP colleague, Ms. Malcolmson.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): That was a perfect set-up by my Conservative friend.

In section 1.58 and section 1.65, the report specifically identifies the absence of mandatory directives as a barrier, but in the recommendations there's no reference at all.

Can you say again why you didn't actually make recommendations that the government or the departments even consider making this mandatory?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: Thank you for giving me an opportunity to better explain that yet again.

The office does not propose a policy for the government to adopt. That's the government's prerogative, not the auditors'. The auditors talk about the consequences of policy. It would then be up to the government machinery and to Parliament to decide whether requirements or laws should be changed, and in what fashion.

If you look at paragraph 1.61, our recommendation actually speaks to the fact that these organizations “should take concrete actions to identify and address barriers that prevent the systematic conduct of rigorous” GBA. It's saying that you need to look at all sources of barriers. The whole mandatory requirement may be one of them, but it needs to have a more thorough evaluation of what is actually stopping us from moving forward, and then, for each individual element, deciding what would be the best thing to do to move forward.

That's what we expect out of this management action plan that I spoke to earlier. They wrote a response. They said they agreed. Well, they need to take it back now and try to come back at some juncture and say, “Here are the barriers we've analyzed. Some of them may be the same as the ones the Auditor General's office has identified. But we may come up with other ones, or have a different view.”

Whatever it is, management has to conduct due diligence and then act accordingly to improve GPA implementation.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Yes. It's fascinating, and I really appreciate the work your office has done. For us to have these very strong findings, both 2009 and 2015, I think is a real call to action.

We have the three recommendations that the department made. The three agencies that replied all said they agree with the recommendation, but then the language is depressingly soft. It makes it look like we're going to be on this hamster wheel forever. I mean, saying that they will continue to require that agencies consider the application "as appropriate" doesn't sound very solid to me. They will consider developing a "checklist", and do more "training". Many of the responses say they will "continue". It sounds like business as usual.

We heard from the Minister of Status of Women on Tuesday that Immigration has mandated gender-based analysis within their operations. They have a great record as a result of having mandated it 10 years ago, at least, and that's helpful.

I guess I wish, if you were writing the report, you'd have said, "For example, please consider mandatory measures." It might have moved us a little further along. But I guess that will be up to this committee and I do hope we take that on as an active consideration.

Do I have more time, Chair?

The Chair: Oh, yes. You have four minutes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Okay.

I'm curious to know whether you found anything about the application of gender-based analysis to private member's legislation and government legislation. I know that on the NDP caucus side, we have a gender lens with which we make all of our recommendations on how we'll vote on legislation that comes to caucus. There's a gender section. I'm just checking with our team to make sure it actually looks like GBA as opposed to something more soft.

Have you seen any practices around how private members' bills are screened, or government legislation, beyond just the piece that would go through each government department?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: Madam Chair, I'll ask Richard to help me answer that question.

The Chair: By the way, you've been doing a marvellous job answering questions. Thank you.

Mr. Richard Domingue (Principal, Office of the Auditor General of Canada): We did not look at private members' bills specifically. In the sample of 16 initiatives that we selected, there was at least one revision to an act. As well, one regulation was introduced. This was in terms of looking for GBA evidence.

But in our sample, no, there were no private members' proposals.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: That's also work for us to take up, maybe, because it's a lot of the work that is moving through government.

Ms. Nancy Cheng: If I may, I would really encourage the committee to not be restricted to the wording in our recommendations. When you look at the various findings, you will have your own report, and have your own view. Your recommendations can go further or they can go less far. They do not have to dovetail with our recommendations at all. You can be more specific in terms of asking for a government response.

Our role is to bring observations to the table, to Parliament, so that parliamentarians can be aware of what the consequences are. Then

you consider what you need to do. We cannot compel departments and agencies to do things. You are in a different position.

• (1555)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Beyond the absence of mandatory requirements, did you identify other big-picture barriers, which if we were to highlight in our political side might also mean that we get a different result the next time the AG looks at this policy?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: We highlighted that in paragraph 1.58, where we have identified a few issues.

I think the area about awareness and training cannot be overstated. People have to understand it, rather than just feel that it is yet another thing they need to do when their window to prepare these Treasury Board submissions and the memorandums to cabinet can be so tight. People are trying to do the right thing and we need to help support them so that they can indeed be able to do that.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: That might also go to Vice-Chair Damoff's point around raising the level of awareness by the policy-makers so that this becomes as important as a budget filter, say, for decisions that are coming forward.

Ms. Nancy Cheng: If I may, I would add another point. One of the things we observed when we looked at the 19 that did implement the GBA+ framework, which another member highlighted earlier, was that the weak area is the sixth element. There are six elements to the GBA framework in terms of practices that Status of Women has suggested. The one weak spot is reporting.

Reporting helps with transparency and accountability. If there is not a lot of information there, people don't know about it and don't ask questions about it. In terms of external reporting at the departmental level, there was virtually none. People don't know if things were done or not done, or if something was done and there were no gender impacts, or if there were some but they didn't care to mention it.

Status of Women can also step up to give you more of an overall state of play, which isn't happening. What they have done is highlight some activities that have been going on, which is useful, but if they can tell you.... You don't have to wait for an Auditor General's report to tell you that 19 out of 25 were implemented, right? On an annual basis, Status of Women has a formal reporting instrument. Through that, they can say that so many have committed, so many have been implemented, and that this is what they see. That gives this committee more information in order to understand if there has been progress, if the progress is good, and if it is up to your expectations. If not, you can ask questions.

I think reporting is another way to help with transparency and accountability. That might help to move the file forward as well.

The Chair: Over to you, Ms. Vandenberg.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thank you for this extensive report and for appearing before us today.

I want to pick up on this notion of the mandatory requirement, because it seems to me that we had an audit in 2009, and now here we are, six or seven years later, and another audit shows very little progress, if any. Obviously, something needs to be done differently.

I know that in a number of jurisdictions the language has moved from GBA to gender-responsive budgeting. That includes, in many cases, mandatory requirements and deadlines, but it also includes a broader input by civil society, by Parliament, and by other stakeholders. I'm wondering if that may be something that we might want to look at. I know that you don't do policy, but in your opinion would that be something that would improve things?

I also want to follow up on your comment about non-compliance, because I'm struggling with that difference. If you have a report and you're saying there has been no progress and there's limited application, what kind of teeth...? What would non-compliance do that currently we can't do if there isn't an actual requirement? I'd be interested in hearing about that and also about whether or not you think the changes need to be legislative. Could they be policy-based? For instance, in Citizenship and Immigration, it's clearly in the legislation. It's in the act. But does it have to be legislated? Is it possible that we could accomplish this through other means?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: Madam Chair, I hope I remember all the different elements of the questions. If I miss one, please do remind me.

First and foremost in terms of looking at other elements, there is always room for that, and I think Status of Women should really keep the broad outlook in terms of seeing what the best practices might be. They are the centre of excellence, so they can look at all sorts of options and then come back to recommend one that is more pragmatic for the Government of Canada. In terms of the basic research, certainly we would encourage them to go broadly.

In terms of the question of non-compliance, actually we need to complete that question—non-compliance against what? If it's non-compliance against the law, well, we are a law-abiding society. We have to set examples, so why should the government not abide by its own law? That's not good to actually be setting an example for the citizenry. When there is a non-compliance with the law you'll see that the tone of the audit report goes a lot more harshly, so we would have a much harder tone in terms of saying that department X did not comply with this law, and then we may go on to say that this would result in something not being done. The law is there for a reason.

If it's policy and directives, they're generally encouraging the best behaviour, good behaviour, or acceptable behaviour. They are sanctioned by the government so they have a right unto themselves, so that's still reasonably serious. Those kinds of issues tend to be picked up by the management board, maybe. The Treasury Board Secretariat may then take a stronger view on those. They're not quite like a non-compliance with the law, but it still has consequences, and

we would still most times be somewhat harsh on that. We also have to go to the policy intent to ask, why does it matter? There are policies and policies, and there are some that are more far-reaching in terms of consequence than others, so we'll have to adjust our tone accordingly.

Did I miss another element? There was something else.

• (1600)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Well, just on the legislative—

Ms. Nancy Cheng: On the last point of whether it requires a legislative fix, it's not necessarily through legislation. If you have a government directive or a policy requirement out of the Treasury Board Secretariat, it serves the same purpose in terms of actually having a mandate—people need to do this. Right now that's not out there and that's what we were referring to.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you.

I am sharing my time today with Ms. Sahota.

The Chair: Right, so now we're going to turn it over to Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Hello, and thank you for being here today.

As you can see from the line of questioning, everyone is very interested in figuring out how we can better implement your recommendations, going into the future.

Are there other areas? You review all types of government activity and audit that. Are there other areas that you would think would be similar to GBA, where they've done something that has been very effective, whether it was mandatory or whether it was a reporting requirement as you were discussing? I'm quite interested in that.

Are there any comparisons or some lines you can draw for us?

Mr. Richard Domingue: There is a cabinet directive for departments to perform strategic environmental assessments, so whenever there is a proposal they have to do an environmental assessment. This is done through a cabinet directive. This is one avenue that could be taken to force GBA to be performed, through a cabinet directive.

There are many means by which you could do that. It seems to work for the environmental assessment. It might work for gender-based analysis, but it's up to the government to decide how they would approach this: through a cabinet directive, a formal policy, or individual departments selecting their own means to perform GBA.

Ms. Nancy Cheng: I'll just add a little bit to that, if I may.

When you actually have a requirement like that, all submissions of Treasury Board and MCs are challenged by the central agencies. If there is an explicit policy requirement on that, you may see a stronger challenge function, and that should not be understated in terms of its merit as well. If you have a Treasury Board submission that Treasury Board Secretariat does not support, you're going to have a hard time going to the Treasury Board ministers.

That will be helpful as well when you look at stepping back to look at the types of instruments you can use to encourage or require the government to do certain things.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Going back to what you mentioned about the environmental assessments, could you elaborate a little bit more about exactly how that procedure worked and what the steps are? That may help guide us a little bit as to recommendations we can make as a committee to the Status of Women on the things we need to look at and compare to the Department of the Environment, and how, in your opinion, they have achieved success on putting more teeth into the recommendation.

• (1605)

Ms. Nancy Cheng: Richard, maybe you can continue to explain that.

Mr. Richard Domingue: The process, put simply, is that whenever there is a policy proposal being analyzed, they have to put the environmental lens on it and try to assess what the environmental impact of this policy initiative will be. This information is then relayed to the policy-makers through the documents to cabinet or through a TB submission, and this feeds into the system.

At the end it's a question of compromise. A policy initiative might have a different impact. It might have a regional impact, it might have an economic impact, or it might have an ethnicity impact. The environment is one factor that you will consider in the end to make a decision. At least on the environmental side, it looks as if the process in place seems to be better informing policy-makers on the environmental impact of those policy initiatives.

Ms. Nancy Cheng: In other words, there is a template to be completed when you file these Treasury Board submissions and MCs. In there, there is a box that you need to complete, so to speak, on these environmental assessments and also on GBA. The Treasury Board analysts or the PCO analysts look at these documents and they understand that there is a requirement to actually be asking whether you've done an environmental assessment in one of the boxes. With the GBA one, if they just say N/A or don't fill it in, it may not get the same level of challenge because there is no underlying mandate to compel the department to do that. It's kind of expected. You've committed to do so, so if you put something there, the rigour might differ somewhat when you are in the shoes of the analyst looking at these submissions.

Mr. Richard Domingue: If I may add, it doesn't mean that because there's a requirement to perform an environmental assessment, they're well done. They might be taking shortcuts and writing that there's no environmental impact, whereas in reality there is an environmental impact.

Ms. Nancy Cheng: We're not making that observation.

Mr. Richard Domingue: We've seen TB submissions with GBA that said that there was no gender impact, but there was no evidence that we could see from which they concluded that there was no gender impact.

The Chair: All right.

We're back over to Ms. Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you.

Thank you very much for coming today and for all the information that you've been able to provide us. You're certainly doing a very good job answering our questions.

I have a few questions. I'm wondering if you can help me understand some of the problems that we see in the departments that don't use the GBA versus the departments that do use the GBA. Can you help me understand if we have an understanding of the contrast in terms of pros versus cons or the benefit of the GBA? Do we have a comparison analysis?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: The best thing is really to look at the four departments that we looked at in a more in-depth way because our look at the other 19 was kind of like a snapshot in terms of what's happening with the group of 25 that have made that formal commitment.

When you look at the four—we have an exhibit on page 9, exhibit 1.2—it kind of lays out where they're at with respect to their ability and their efforts in terms of doing the GBA analysis. We highlighted earlier that Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, for example, have certain processes that they've adopted to help support this. You see that they seem to have a stronger track. Industry Canada was one that seems to be weaker because they haven't got certain elements of the GBA and they also haven't implemented many of the elements of the GBA framework that was discussed earlier in the hearing.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

Can you help me understand a specific example of where there was a change that was made based on results from a GBA and it benefited the department? Can you actually give me a case study?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: If we turn to page 10, exhibit 1.3 was one of those examples. In part, we're also trying to help readers understand what this is all about.

In this particular case, when you look at what departments are supposed to do, they're supposed to gather data sources and base it on empirical data. They're supposed to consult stakeholder groups and then analyze that vis-à-vis the policy proposition that they have and ask, "Does this policy initiative have a different impact on the different genders?"

First off, if it doesn't, fine, you can stop there. If it does not, are there additional measures or additional policy elements that should be considered?

In this particular case, it's one that refers to a family violence and prevention program. It was when they were re-evaluating an existing program to see if changes had to be made. In the second last paragraph it says that when they are updating the analysis, the department performed a program evaluation and during that program evaluation they were able to consult with women's groups. They were able to get feedback from women to see the impact.

Essentially, this program tends to affect women and children who might be victims of family violence. There is an impact on men and boys as well. The study shows that men and boys who have been exposed to these cases later on in life might actually become victims or perpetrators themselves. From the understanding of the program and how it'll affect the different genders, they put on a program for men and boys who might have suffered from cases like that. They could actually make the program more effective in the prevention.

By looking at what they're faced with, what the data shows, and stepping back to think about how the program affects this and if they need to add on different things, then there are results.

That's what we were referring to, and Status of Women Canada will probably be a better organization to give you more specific examples, but we certainly see some impact when GBA is properly done.

• (1610)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Am I correct in understanding that the results of the GBA are really up to the cabinet minister then to take those results and implement them in order to change the department?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: I don't know if I have a good answer for that. It's an international commitment that the government has made. How the government chooses to implement some of these international commitments is sometimes a weak spot in terms of how we further whatever policy objectives we have. It's not necessarily restricted to the gender issue either.

The point is that if you have a government representative going to a UN forum, we sign up and we sign up as a government. When they come back, what happens? We need to make that link in terms of ensuring there is that implementation aspect of it, so we can respect our commitment.

The Chair: Ms. Ludwig.

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Thank you for your excellent presentation and the questions around the room were fantastic too.

One of the things struck me when you were speaking. I was just reflecting on our responsibilities and roles in standing committees. How would it be if every committee—there are 24 standing committees—incorporated a gender-based analysis into the types of questions that people ask, the witnesses that are invited, the reporting that is done, as well as the recommendations?

How do you think that might change some of the outcomes of standing committees if a gender-based analysis was used by all members of standing committees?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: Again, I don't think I have a wise answer to that. Certainly, with a new Parliament, with new committee structures, it is important that the various committees interact with one another, so that you're working in synergy. If you have a subject that's being studied by one, but there is interest from the other ones, then hopefully there could be a consolidated view as to what might be the committee's report and recommendations, so that the government can take that on and respond to it.

I think coordination is a good part of it. What you don't want is multiple committees studying exactly the same questions. It's not a

good use of your time. Then, if you have varying recommendations out of that, that would make it very difficult for the government to respond and implement. Working with the chairs of the various committees might be a way forward to minimize those kinds of situations.

It's good if multiple committees have an interest in a certain subject. It means that a subject is really important to Parliament and probably to the citizenry. The challenge is how we best move forward to help improve that aspect of public administration.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Thank you.

You mentioned that some departments' reporting has been poor regarding GBA. Has any department successfully reported on it?

There are a couple of parts to this question. If so, which ones and what did the reports show? The third part of the question is about the costing of GBA. I'm interested to know how much it actually costs to implement and execute.

• (1615)

Ms. Nancy Cheng: I highlighted earlier that reporting is indeed a weak spot. There is no external reporting by any of the departments.

In terms of cost, do we have any information? I'll ask Richard.

Mr. Richard Domingue: No.

Ms. Nancy Cheng: No. There is no costing information.

Again, though, Status of Women Canada might be in a position to help you gather such information. It is a centre of excellence to promote GBA. I think they would welcome any interest from parliamentary committees and the government to try to move this forward. I think they're quite keen to see changes and see better GBA being done moving forward.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Looking at specific sectors, are there any particular sectors that are better or worse with GBA?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: I don't believe our audit tried to look sector by sector. What we did was select several portfolios, so four departments out of the 25 were selected so that we could look at some of their initiatives.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: I also want to comment on a statement my colleague made about the need for understanding of gender-based analysis.

Just after it was announced that I was going to be on this committee, somebody posted a message on Facebook saying, "It's nothing personal, but why do we actually need a committee in 2016 on the status of women?"

I will say that there is a fair bit of misunderstanding of the role of Status of Women Canada, what it's expected to do, and what it needs to do. I hope that through this committee we also do a very thorough job in getting those recommendations not only reported, but understood as well.

The Chair: All right. We go back to my Conservative colleagues.

Mrs. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thanks very much.

Once again, what kind of training is available for GBA? Is anything available for parliamentarians, so that they can learn more?

Carrying on with Karen's point, that GBA is a new term, as Karen and Pam said, what is it that we can do, and how can we train parliamentarians as well?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: I believe that Status of Women Canada would welcome the opportunity to provide orientation and training for members of this committee and parliamentarians. I don't think I would be speaking out of turn in saying that. I can't see their not welcoming that particular invitation. They can then tailor it to the level of understanding that you might need.

One thing to consider when we're talking about barriers and issues might be more general communication to the Canadian public. But that would be at a different level from what members of this committee need to know to help you study and challenge issues relating to GBA implementation.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'm going to share my time with Ms. Harder.

Oh, I'm sorry. Did you have something to add, Richard?

Mr. Richard Domingue: I was going to say that Status of Women Canada put in place a website on which there's an e-learning module. I think it takes two or three hours to go through the GBA+ training. I understand that some departments are actively promoting the training right now.

It might be a resource that is useful to members of Parliament.

The Chair: You can send the link to the clerk or the clerk will ask you for the link.

Ms. Nancy Cheng: We can certainly provide that information after the hearing.

The Chair: That's good.

We'll go over to you, Ms. Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you. A bit of my background is in research, so I understand the work and the energy that go into doing research or analysis of some sort. I also understand that following analysis you have to do something with the information in order to create change.

We're doing GBA in a number of different departments. At the end of the day, what are we doing with this information to help create change? Is that process streamlined?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: Regarding the process, we look at data, we do consultation, and then we step back to see what that tells us. If it tells us that there are gender issues, then we would expect the public servants to consider how they would modify the program they are proposing or the changes they're going to make to a program, or would add other elements or do something else to mitigate unintended impacts.

The member's question is absolutely right. We don't just do the analysis for the sake of doing it. We do it and then say whether something needs to be done. When senior management reviews it, they should be asking whether there actually is an impact, and if there is an impact, what they are doing about it and whether they are

doing enough. That would indeed be the expectation, if they were to carry out that GBA from beginning to end.

• (1620)

The Chair: Ms. Nassif.

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you for being with us, Ms. Cheng and Mr. Domingue.

The 2015 report noted that not all the recommendations of the 2009 Spring Report of the Auditor General of Canada have been implemented.

Could you share with the committee some of the recommendations that were not implemented and make suggestions as to how these recommendations could be implemented, please?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: Madam Chair, with respect to that particular question, we weren't trying to look at each recommendation and say what elements were recommended or not. We stepped back and asked, "Rolling forward into 2015, given that many more departments have committed to do GBA, what is the state of play?" Our recommendations now do not compare with those in the 2009 report.

The 2009 recommendations prompted a departmental action plan by the Government of Canada. Some of them could be superceded with respect to new events. The 2009 departmental action plan on gender-based analysis is the way the government tells Parliament, "This is how we're going to fix it."

We're auditing against what they said they would do in 2009. The comment was made that not everything was taken care of. When you look at the results—20 years later if you go back to the UN commitment, six or seven years since we did the last audit—a good number of departments didn't accept the framework that Status of Women Canada provided. When we selected 16 initiatives, half of them were not complete or satisfactory.

The Chair: We have time for one more round with Ms. Malcolmson.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you.

I have two questions. First, is there any situation where a GB analysis shouldn't be done at all? Is there ever an excuse for saying it isn't necessary for a particular type of decision or action?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: When we looked at the 16, we were able to see that for a good number of them there were no gender issues. If there are none, then it doesn't beg for further work. That's when the public servants should stop and say, "We've looked at it. There are truly no gender issues." That's what needs to be documented.

What they're sometimes weak on is when there's no gender impact and it's not obvious. In some cases when they say there's no gender impact, we could find evidence to show that perhaps there was. It underscores that the due diligence wasn't sufficient in some cases.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: As I understand it, your finding is that the question always needs to be asked but the answer may come very quickly, and there may not be further work required.

Ms. Nancy Cheng: In some cases it may become clear fairly quickly that there are indeed no gender issues, and we're not trying to create gender issues when there are none.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Understood.

I'm trying to decide what decisions trigger. One concern I've heard is around infrastructure spending. While we already have a pay gap between men and women, infrastructure spending, as great as it is, might have the unintended consequence of increasing that gender gap if, for example, all of the money goes to water treatment pipes, sewers, and classic big heavy construction as opposed to investing in affordable housing, which might be found to have a broader benefit for both genders.

Could you help me understand how particular decisions on separate types of infrastructure spending might be of benefit and how GBA would fit into that decision-making?

Ms. Nancy Cheng: We don't profess to be experts in GBA. I think Status of Women Canada would be in a much better position to help you understand that.

You would look at the different trades. If you're talking about major construction projects, the likely employment opportunities tend to be with men. Is there a gender issue? Is there a women's issue whereby you need to consider how they could benefit women in some respect? In what way?

Sometimes some of these gender-based analyses impacts are not obvious. In some cases they may be. Other times, you actually have to sit back and think about whether there is really an impact on women and whether there are things we can do for women. It's gender neutral, by the way. It's not just for women. It's for men as well.

If decisions affect men and women differently, public servants have to think long and hard, and ask themselves whether they should be doing something additional or differently in terms of policy instruments to make sure that there is more of a balance.

• (1625)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: That's helpful, thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Excellent. Very good.

I just want to thank Richard and Nancy for coming. You were excellent with your answers. Obviously, you know very well the work that was done, and I see around the table an appetite to do some follow-up. I appreciate your input, and we know where you are if we need to call you back in the future. Thank you.

Now we're going to proceed to just a little bit of committee business that may help us with figuring out how to move forward with what we've just heard. I wanted to give you an update based on the steering committee. Remember after last week's, or was it Tuesday's meeting—it seems longer, doesn't it?—the steering committee met, and one of the decisions that was taken was that if reports or motions are to be sent out, we want to abide by the 48-hour rule in order for people to be able to have adequate time for review. Whenever there's a motion that's going to require a vote, we should make sure we send that out 48 hours in advance so that

people can have time to think about it and come back. The only exception to that was the parliamentary library analyst reports, which go in 24 hours.

The clerk has a question. If witnesses send documents less than 48 hours before the meeting, is it okay for us to still have them on the agenda? That's okay? Okay, very good.

Then the second thing was we talked about whether or not to be in the—

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Sorry, can I just get a clarification from the clerk?

The Chair: Sure.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: In terms of the 48-hour notice, my understanding is that's for substantive motions or motions that aren't related to the current topic. For instance, if our topic is on what the business of the committee is going to be, then a motion that comes during the course of that discussion would be okay even if there's not 48-hours'...?

The Chair: That's right.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Okay, I just wanted to clarify.

The Chair: The suggestion of the clerk, which I always follow, is to read specifically what it says:

That forty-eight (48) hours' notice be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the Committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration; and that the notice of motion be filed with the Clerk of the Committee and distributed to members in both official languages; and, that completed motions received by 4:00 p.m. Monday to Friday be distributed to members the same day.

There you are.

The other discussion we had was about whether to go in camera or not. Basically, the steering committee would like to have the default mode be that we are in public view. Typically the only exception to that is when staff come to bring briefings to the committee we go in camera because the thinking is that they are reporting confidentially to the committee as opposed to the public.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Staffing?

The Chair: Staff reports, so librarians, analysts, that sort of individual. That's the typical practice, as I understand it.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Okay. Just, again, for clarification, in one of my other committees we had a number of library reports and we didn't go in camera.

The Chair: This is the common practice; however, if the committee decides that they don't want to do the common practice and they want to be in the public view all the time, I certainly am able to go with a motion for that.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Before we make a decision on that, I respect what Anita is trying to say, but as you're indicating there could be some things there. We're studying in a committee where it could be very confidential. Before we move forward, being all new members, we might not recognize the confidentiality level of some of these reports coming in, so I would recommend having those in camera.

•(1630)

The Chair: Any other discussion on that?

Ms. Malcolmson.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I'd also like to default to be in public. I think that's what our constituents and voters expect. When there is information that might relate to a personal action or a privacy issue, the exception should be that we go in camera and that there be a justifiable reason. In my local government work I've never had staff reports delivered in camera, and I don't think our constituents would expect that.

The Chair: Right. We had a similar discussion at another committee that I was on. That committee decided that they also, for the same reason, wanted to be in the public view. They were going to defer to the chair when we got into the danger zone, or when there were materials that were presented that would be of a sensitive nature, or when witnesses who were going to come would have sensitive information. That would be at the call of the chair.

Could I have a motion of any kind regarding this?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: If I may, I think if there's unanimous consent from the committee to go in camera, I think that would be no problem at all, if we all agree.

The Chair: Are you sure you mean in camera? In camera really means not in public.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: By default we would be in public, and then if there's unanimous consent of the committee to go in camera, we can do that as an operational thing.

This is before another committee as well in terms of what a good practice would be, but I think here it sounds like on an issue like the one you raised, if things are not controversial at all, there would probably be unanimous consent from the committee that we would go in camera.

The Chair: Okay, there's a motion on the floor.

Let's discuss the motion.

Ms. Vecchio.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: It's not a motion; that's just a comment.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I fully respect where Anita's coming from with this. I think it's very important, but then again I believe in full transparency as well and we have to respect some of our colleagues and witnesses and reports.

I think it's great to have that, but we need to have an exemption rule in there. Before we put any rule or any motion through, I think it's very important that we respect that there will be circumstances in which, due to the confidentiality, we may want to step back.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: If I might suggest, I know that the procedure and House affairs committee is looking at this very issue and perhaps we should wait and see what happens, since the procedure committee is often a precedent-setting committee for others.

However, in the interim, in our own work, if we all agree to go in camera we can go in camera, but otherwise we would operate in public.

The Chair: I'm fine with that.

Is there consent for that?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I think there still needs to be an exception to that rule. I fully respect what you're saying, but I think there needs to.... It's great to be in camera but we do need to make sure that we're protecting anything that comes out. It's not about not trying to be transparent, but I think we need to have a default clause for that 1% chance that it may happen.

The Chair: Would you be comfortable if we set our default mode as being open to the public and if any individual on the team had a concern they could move for a vote to go in camera and we would take a vote and by majority we would go in camera?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I respect that.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: What if one of the witnesses doesn't want to be in public?

The Chair: I think that's certainly—

Mrs. Eva Nassif: I'm not that familiar with that but what if the witness is saying something very personal and we accept, but she or he doesn't want to be in public. Do we decide?

The Chair: I believe that maybe the clerk can confirm, but typically if the witness doesn't want to be in public, then they would make that known to us and that would be part of what's sent out to you with the meeting notice.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: So we have to respect this?

The Chair: Yes, absolutely we have to respect that.

Did I hear a motion that we're going to default to be in public?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: We're going to wait on a motion to see what procedure and House affairs does.

The Chair: We'll wait on the motion.

Meanwhile back at the ranch, we will be in public unless a member wants to go in camera, and we'll vote.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Are we moving on now?

The Chair: We're moving on, yes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Go ahead, Karen, I'm sorry.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: I wanted to add that, as we're thinking that one through, that it can be a majority and not necessarily unanimous.

The Chair: Yes, a majority for sure.

The next thing that we talked about was questions that came up regarding the blues distribution.

We had previously agreed that those attending the meeting, including members, assistants, and witnesses, could get hold of the blues distribution. Since then we've had a request today from witnesses who wanted to see the blues from the previous meetings so they could know what kinds of questions were answered. We have had requests from parliamentary assistants and a request from the parliamentary assistant to the RCMP to see the blues.

Would we be willing to open it up so that witnesses are able to access the previous blues, and if we have parliamentary assistants they can see them and the RCMP's parliamentary assistant can see them?

Ms. Damoff and then Ms. Vecchio.

•(1635)

Ms. Pam Damoff: I have a question for the clerk. What's the normal procedure on this and how widely distributed are they?

The Chair: Apparently the standard practice is that the folks who are coming as witnesses can get hold of the blues and parliamentary assistants can get hold of them.

Ms. Pam Damoff: What was the other request?

The Chair: The third one was that the parliamentary assistant to the RCMP has requested access to the blues. I think that's probably because they know we're going to be talking about issues that are potentially related to them. I wouldn't grant that access without the committee's approval.

Ms. Ludwig.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: The only thing I would throw into this, just to keep putting stuff out there, is that the sessions are recorded. I have a student who is working for me at a university and she watches it every day. They could probably get access to the recordings.

The Chair: The driver is that it's automated for them to get the blues sent to them, instead of having to go to each different committee meeting. It's sort of an efficiency measure.

I'm not seeing unanimous consent on this one.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I'm confused. The assistant to the RCMP wants to automatically get the blues from our committee, all of them?

The Chair: Yes.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Andrea McCaffrey): I want to clarify. It's the manager of parliamentary affairs for the RCMP that has requested a copy of the blues. We only circulate the blues that are for public meetings. Any in camera blues, of course, would not be circulated.

They will be able to access these transcripts in about 10 days' time because they will be made public. These are just the unofficial transcripts. These are the blues.

The Chair: Mrs. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you very much for this clarification.

If it is something that is reported and it is in camera, I believe that we should give that 10-day waiting period when it comes to the RCMP. I believe that is a protocol that has been set there and I respect what you're saying.

I believe it's important to have the transparency. If it's something that's public, then it's easy to send out, but when it's something that's in camera, we do need to respect those persons.

I don't know, but if something needs to have the immediate attention of the RCMP within 24 hours' notice, then at the call of the chair and the committee, it can be immediately shared.

The Chair: Ms. Vandenberg.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: My understanding, and this is the difference between the recording and the blues, is that the reason for the blues is that you actually have manual typing going on and there could be errors. In a recording, you're visually watching it. It's direct and obviously, there's no issue there.

When you're typing it, the people who spoke should have the ability to review what the transcript says to ensure that it accurately reflects what they said. Therefore, there's a time period in which those corrections can be made before it becomes public.

It seems to me that it should be limited to those who actually spoke in committee and to their personal staff. If there is an error and it does go out to anybody outside, there's an erroneous record that could be out there.

I would say that the blues should remain internal.

The Chair: We would be okay with the blues staying internal for people that attend the meetings. We would also allow access for witnesses that are coming to our meeting to see previous blues. Is that correct?

Ms. Pam Damoff: I don't know.

The Chair: No. You're not good with that? Okay.

Maybe we should stick to what we had and say no to everybody else.

Ms. Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I have a point of clarification. Are we talking about in camera blues as well or are we just talking about public blues?

The Chair: It's just about public blues.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Okay.

In terms of in camera blues, who has access to those? Do we have access to those at a committee level?

The Chair: Only the clerk.

•(1640)

The Clerk: Anybody is welcome to come and review them. I'll read the motion regarding in camera transcripts that we had agreed to:

That one copy of the transcript of all in camera meetings be kept in the Committee Clerk's office for consultation by members of the Committee.

Typically, if you need to review them, you would have to visit me in my office and review them there.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

The Clerk: If I can also clarify one piece of information. Whenever we send out the blues, there is always a disclaimer that says that these are unedited and they're not quotable.

The Chair: What I'm hearing then is that we are going to keep the blues here for the people who attend the meeting and that is the way it is and everyone else is out of luck. They can watch it on TV.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: They can record it.

The Chair: That's what we're going to do. Excellent.

Ms. Malcolmson.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I have a question. What's the time lag between our meetings and when there is a publicly available transcript?

The Chair: It's 10 business days.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Okay.

The Chair: To me we're fulfilling that transparency requirement from the point of view of the public. We're preventing any errors from going out and showing all the good points that were made. Thank you for that.

I want to just remind people about a couple of things. One is that our meeting on March 8 will have to end early because the minister has invited us to the International Women's Day event that starts at five o'clock at the National Arts Centre. The suggestion is that we end the meeting at 4:30. Is everybody good with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Beautiful.

Ms. Damoff, you have one more thing?

Ms. Pam Damoff: I actually just had an idea to put out there. We don't have to do it.

Ms. Harder had put forward a request for a study. I incorporated part of that and circulated an idea for a study that we could do.

I'm just wondering if we want to consider doing that, rather than waiting until the eighth. Then we could move on and get witnesses. I know you circulated the list and had asked to have comments back by the second, and I'm happy to do that. I just wondered if everyone wanted to move ahead with that particular study as opposed to waiting until the eighth.

The Chair: I think that because we said that anything substantive we're going to work on needs to get 48 hours' notice, and I just saw this today, then I would suggest that we do put it off.

I think it's very good, but I think that in addition to that there may be other ideas that come in before the second, and then we would consolidate those ideas and bring that back on the eighth to vote on.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Can I just have a quick point of clarification from the chair?

I want to make sure I understand this 48-hour limit. My understanding is that this second half of the meeting is with regard to committee business.

The Chair: A small portion of committee business was intended for updating you about what happened at the steering committee, and then Alex Smith will be coming.

Because we're all new, and we'll be studying the estimates, and we don't have a lot of training in what we're supposed to be doing on estimates, Alex is going to come and explain the mystery.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Sorry.

My actual question within that—I am treating this as a learning opportunity, I guess—is that if we are talking about committee business right now, in my estimation the motion that Pam brought forward is committee business, and therefore it would be appropriate to bring it forward at this point in time, without necessarily needing to adhere to a 48-hour notice period.

The Chair: I'm interested to hear the views on the committee on that.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: On that, I understand there was a motion tabled at the end of the last meeting.

We could do this as an amendment to that motion and just have the mover of that motion bring that forward, if that's your wish.

The Chair: Have you seen the information?

Ms. Rachael Harder: I have it in front of me.

If it would be appropriate to do that at this time, I wouldn't have a problem doing that.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: I would just make a friendly amendment to the motion.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I would be in agreement with that.

The Chair: Ms. Malcolmson and then Ms. Vandenbeld.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I think it was really clear at our steering committee meeting and then at the opening of this meeting that we're not doing "green bananas" as you call it in other work. We were handed these motions five minutes before the meeting. That's not 48 hours. I don't think they can be discussed today.

• (1645)

The Chair: Ms. Vandenbeld.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Can I just get clarification from the clerk about the tabled motion?

If we're talking about committee business now, and there was a motion that tabled having to do with committee business at the end of the last meeting, if the mover of that motion wishes to bring that motion forward now, and now there's a friendly amendment in terms of the text here, would she therefore be allowed to bring that motion forward, and then amend it?

The Chair: Because at the steering team meeting we made a specific point about making sure that people had enough time to consider things, I think that's a fundamentally important principle.

I don't vote, so the fact that I haven't seen it, is neither here nor there. But Ms. Malcolmson has not seen it. I don't think that this is a fair thing.

For this general motion, I'm interested in you weighing in on this.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Sure. Sorry, I certainly did not mean to cause any sort of dissension, quite the opposite actually. I'm interested in working as a unified team going forward and certainly want to work with you on this.

That said, I think in light of the fact that Ms. Malcolmson has not seen this, I do believe that it's in the best interest of this committee in working collaboratively going forward that we put this on hold. At this point in time I will not bring my motion back to the table and I will not make an amendment to it. Let's give this some time and due process and then let's come back and collaborate as a team.

The Chair: Ms. Vandenberg.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Having done that, my concern is that we have a meeting coming up on March 8, and as far as I understand, there isn't anything on the agenda for that meeting right now.

The Chair: This is on the agenda for the meeting.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: So we would have a two-hour meeting to discuss simply—

The Chair: No, only a one-hour meeting because we have to leave early for the international women's event.

Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Does Ms. Harder's motion even exist? Is it on the table? It wasn't circulated 48 hours ahead in writing, you know, all of those.... It was a verbal motion made at that point, so are we going to come back to that motion or even be able to have it amended?

The Chair: I think we will come back to that motion. My understanding is, chronologically, that she made the motion before we had a 48-hour agreement, and we accepted the motion. Then when the steering team met, we decided that we would go with the 48-hour deal, so that's why I think the motion is still there, and we will talk about it.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: But anything that the steering committee decides, does that not have to come before our full committee before it gets...? That was something that was discussed last time.

The Chair: That's true. Anything that the steering committee talks about has to come back here, and that's why we're having committee business today.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Sorry, I have another clarification from the clerk. They are saying that there's a motion on the table. It is in order because at the last meeting we didn't have a 48-hour rule. Then, that motion can be brought forward but it cannot be amended.

The Chair: No, no, it certainly can be amended.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Okay. Although the mover of the motion seems to have withdrawn putting the motion right now, I just wanted clarification.

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff: We're going to have a full hour next time to do this. I'm wondering, in the interest of having something else to consider at that meeting, if maybe the analyst could put together some information on violence against young women and girls, cyber-bullying, to give us a bit of a report. We don't have to commit to a study on it, but perhaps we could have some more information to review prior to the next meeting, along the lines of some of the things that we have discussed that were in that.

Would there be any objection to that? It's not committing us to anything.

The Chair: Ms. Malcolmson.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: From the email of February 24, we have been asked, any of us who have ideas for future action, to prepare them in the form of a motion and send them in to the clerk no later than March 2. That gives us the time to read in advance and we would see everybody's motions. That would be the body of our work for the March 8 meeting, so I think we're going to really fill that hour.

At that point, it seems that then we could decide which study or briefing is more important than another. To me, what we talked about at the very beginning of this meeting and what was described for March 2 means that everybody will have full notice. Everybody's proposals will all be in one agenda package, and then we'll be able to look at them all at the same time and really fill that hour probably very full.

• (1650)

The Chair: I agree with that. There is one question that I want to clarify in my mind as we go forward. I have brought back to this committee that the steering committee wants the 48 hours in place. I think somebody—was it Ms. Sahota?—asked if it had to come back here. It does come back here and you do have the ability then to talk about it. We could call a vote on that. You can choose not to go with your steering team.

Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Can I get clarification? When we talked about the 48 hours, we were talking about the scope of study. What exactly is this 48 hours in terms of motions going forward? For everything that we do, do we have to give 48 hours' notice? It seems a little muddled. What we talked about in the steering committee was.... What is defined as substantive?

The Clerk: I would want to refer to the rules to provide you with the correct answer to that question.

Ms. Pam Damoff: For example, if we were having a committee meeting and decided to start a study, and something came up and we decided we wanted to change the path of the committee, can we not move a motion at that meeting and vote on it without having 48 hours' notice? It doesn't seem to make sense to me that every single motion has to have 48 hours' notice. I'd really like some clarity on this, because I can see our wanting at some point to bring something forward and not necessarily providing 48 hours' notice.

The Chair: We have the flexibility as a committee to decide what we want to do. Even if we decide we never want to have 48 hours' notice, we can do that. We just need to make sure that we're clear up front which things we are going to wait for and which things we are not going to wait for, so that we don't—

Ms. Pam Damoff: I'm not clear at all.

The Chair: Mrs. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: At the beginning of this discussion, I wrote down "substantive motion, 48 hours unless it's currently the work of the committee". Until we have clarification of the definition of "substantive", I don't think it means that small motions have to be deferred for 48 hours; rather, we're looking at "substantive".

As Ms. Malcolmson and I agree, this is a substantive motion we're looking at, so the 48 hours now—

Ms. Pam Damoff: I'm not worried about your giving.... We've moved on.

But I'm curious, going forward—I'm not clear at all—about what is substantive and what is not.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That's why I think, with the clerk about to give us that definition, that we will have it clear. She has it right here, as we're speaking.

The Chair: Here it is. Substantive motions are independent proposals of two types. One is an order. It provides instruction to the chair and to the committee staff. The second type is a resolution, which is a motion in which the committee expresses its opinion on a specific matter.

I would say that this is a motion.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: It's very elastic.

The Chair: It's very “government”, isn't it?

We can agree as a team what we want to do. I would personally like to see the flow such that, when we're here and we are talking about a topic at the table and start to see consensus or a common theme, somebody would make a motion, we could vote at that time, and that would be it.

But I don't want to have things show up that people haven't had time to think about or consider and force a vote on that. To me, that's something on which you can't make a good decision, because you haven't had time to really think about it.

Ms. Vandenberg.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Can I just clarify that the steering committee is not recommending a more stringent application of the standing order or a change to it? It's just an interpretation. We are still operating under the Standing Orders as they pertain to motions. We're not trying to change that. My understanding is that we can't change the Standing Orders.

The Chair: Right.

Ms. Malcolmson.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Could I also please ask the chair to read the qualifier from the rules that you read at the beginning of the meeting? To me it gave some assurance that if it's an agenda item that people were prepared to discuss, of course we can put motions.

The Chair: It is:

That forty-eight (48) hours' notice be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the Committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration; and that the notice of motion be filed with the Clerk of the Committee and distributed to members in both official languages; and, that completed motions received by 4:00 p.m. Monday to Friday be distributed to members the same day.

Let's say that March 8 comes along and we're talking about the violence against women study that we want to do. People can bring motions that day, because that's what we're talking about, and there is no issue with that.

But today, because we were talking about GBA and estimates, it's not the topic of conversation for today. That's why it's a substantive motion. Does that help?

Ms. Harder.

• (1655)

Ms. Rachael Harder: I'm sorry, I don't mean to flog this more than needed. I think Pam is happy to let this rest and I'm happy to let it rest. But just for a point of clarification, in my estimation right now, according to the agenda, we are officially under the category of committee business, which would then mean that this motion can in fact be brought to the floor without 48 hours' notice.

The Chair: That would be a lesson for the chair to not call it committee business but call it an update on what the steering committee said—point taken.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I'm open to it. If you guys want to vote on it, that's great. But I think you need to recognize that Ms. Malcolmson is not comfortable with voting on it and Mrs. Vecchio is not comfortable with voting on it, so I think that in the spirit of fairness to the committee we should take the time.

Ms. Vandenberg.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: I think what I'm hearing and what we all agree on is that we are choosing not to bring this forward because there are members of the committee who are uncomfortable, not that we could not have brought it forward. The rules don't prevent us, but we are choosing.

The Chair: That is correct.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you, Anita.

To add to that, I think here's basically what I'm looking for. Again, I think all of us around this table are brand new and we're learning these procedures and these protocols, so I'm simply looking for a point of clarification and just a note that in the future, perhaps, if we're not wanting to call this committee business, we can call it something else.

The Chair: I will be much more clear. Lesson and point taken.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Marilyn, I think you're doing a great job.

The Chair: Well, you know....

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: It's continuous improvement.

What I would say, then, is that the motion you prepared, Ms. Damoff, as well as all of the motions that people submit, will go to the clerk and she will issue all of those on March 3 so that you can all see them and have time to take a look at them. There's certainly an opportunity for you guys to get together, collaborate, and try to put any additional information into one that you would bring on the eighth, which will be the meeting where we'll talk about this, and then the tenth will be the meeting where we have members back to review the actual estimates.

Mr. Arya, welcome.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): I have just a quick note for information only on the gender-based analysis. I am part of the public accounts committee. We just decided today that we are going to do an in-depth study on the same subject.

The Chair: Excellent. I'll tap the gavel here for you. That's excellent.

At this time, I'd like to call on Alex Smith, who is going to give us a presentation. Alex has requested, because he is a staff member who is bringing information here, that we go in camera. Is there support to do that?

Mrs. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I think it is as we've discussed. If the witness wishes to go in camera, that is his prerogative and this committee should support that.

The Chair: All right? Let's go in camera. We will suspend while we do that.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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