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

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, March 7, 2017**

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**Chair**

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu**



## Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Tuesday, March 7, 2017

• (1600)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)):**  
Good afternoon and welcome.

[English]

We're happy to be here this afternoon for our panel discussion on the participation of women in politics. We're very pleased to have with us today Victoria deJong from Edmonton Griesbach, Elinor McNamee-Annett from Delta, Estelle Ah-Kiow from Mississauga—Lakeshore, and Melinda Phuong from Markham—Thornhill.

Welcome, ladies. You'll each have three minutes to make your opening comments, and then we'll go to questions.

Melinda, we'll start with you.

**Ms. Melinda Phuong (As an Individual):** My name is Melinda Julie Phuong. I am representing the riding of Markham—Thornhill. I am honoured to be here today to talk about how cyber-bullying in schools affects girls' decisions to take on leadership roles in the future.

As a delegate and educator, I intend to shed light on this issue so that misogynistic and sexist comments online will become non-existent, as will the hesitation of girls and young women with regard to leadership moving forward.

Although cyber-bullying affects everyone, research in the U.K. and U.S. shows that girls are significantly more likely to be cyber-bullied than are boys. I believe this is because girls and women are targeted based on their gender, something that boys and men don't seem to face as regularly.

Since ignoring and blocking people on social media are only band-aid solutions, we need to examine underlying problems. Canadian research from 2013 shows that both boys and girls reported similar rates of being perpetrators, whereas victims of cyber-bullying were more likely to be girls. Therefore, we can't assume that boys are the only ones making such revolting comments to girls.

As bell hooks says, "Patriarchy has no gender." When all children fail to learn that these types of comments are wrong, this can be traumatic to girls' self-esteem and well-being. These girls may grow up no longer believing that they can be anything they want to be.

While I was teaching, I would have conversations with my high school students about cyber-bullying. It was very frightening to hear that some of these students didn't see anything wrong with the sexist

and misogynistic comments they were making online. In fact, they believed they were doing these girls a favour.

What really broke my heart was hearing some of these girls say that because of cyber-bullying, they had actually avoided going to school sometimes, and they'd avoided joining clubs, trying out for sports, and even running for student council to dodge any negative attention or even more cyber-bullying. Not a single boy I asked had the same worries.

The graduate student in me knows that these casual conversations are not things that can be generalized, but as reported recently on CBC, women politicians are facing an increase in sexist comments online. I am sure I am not the only woman in this room who has personally dealt with cyber-bullying either. Really, if we have girls who are not going to school because of cyber-bullying, let alone avoiding leadership opportunities, Canadians need to look at what's going on. This is not okay.

We talk about building resilience in young children, which is essential for them to be successful in life, but we also need to change the way children are being socialized. Anti-cyber-bullying policies likely won't do much alone, but supporting organizations that do meaningful work on bullying, supporting inclusion-based policies, and funding longitudinal research to examine long-term effects of cyber-bullying on girls could be beneficial.

Cyber-bullying transcends all party lines. Women's issues transcend all party lines. For public leaders and role models for young Canadians, calling out and speaking up against cyber-bullying of your women colleagues is a step in the right direction, because if girls keep shutting out the possibilities of seeing themselves as leaders early in life, then efforts to get them to run for office or become CEOs as women will not get any easier.

**The Chair:** That was excellent. Thank you very much.

We'll go to Victoria deJong.

You have three minutes as well.

**Ms. Victoria deJong (As an Individual):** Thank you so much for having us today.

My name is Victoria deJong, and I am the delegate for Edmonton Griesbach. For the next few minutes, I'll be talking about women's political participation and the way parties need to step up to run women.

As I'm sure we all know, women are less likely than similarly educated men to consider themselves qualified to run for office. Women have to be asked an average of five or more times before they run for office, while men will often come up with the idea on their own. Women in general will consider the idea of running significantly less often than men, for reasons that go beyond the scope of this three-minute presentation. These are all facts that we know to be true, based on research that organizations such as Equal Voice have compiled. These facts are not up for debate.

I see two steps that need to be taken to improve women's direct participation in politics, the first being that more specialized research needs to be done to identify the reasons that diverse groups of women differ in their participation. While only 26% of members of the House of Commons are women, these women are more often than not a fairly homogenous group. If we look around the table at the status of women committee, we don't see very much diversity in the women who are here today.

Although we have evidence of the barriers that exist, more research needs to be done to concretely identify the barriers that stop indigenous women, other women of colour, LGBTQ women, disabled women, and other marginalized groups from running for office and engaging politically.

Another group that is often overlooked is girls, as Melinda just talked about. The study of children and their conceptions of leadership and self-confidence is largely under-researched, as well as the way that these conceptions shift from childhood to teenagehood to adulthood.

The second step that I want to focus on and believe to be one of the most important, because it involves direct action, is this. We know, based on research, that the issue of under-representation of women in the political sphere does not lie with voters. An approximately similar percentage of women and men who are nominated will win seats in federal elections, so the issue lies not with voters but with the parties that run candidates.

I'd like therefore to speak to the members of this committee not as a committee of the whole but as members of your parties. You all have the responsibility to make sure that nominating women and nominating diverse women are a priority for each of your parties.

Party members have a duty to identify the women in communities across the country who do incredible and important work in their communities. Parties must lower the barriers to running by providing information and assistance to women who consider running and lowering the financial burden on women who run for office—and all people who run for office. Your parties must make it a priority to recruit diverse groups of women, because as the Daughters of the Vote initiative shows, Canada has no shortage of incredible, talented women who are willing and able to take their seats.

Thank you.

•(1605)

**The Chair:** Excellent.

Now we go to Estelle Ah-Kiow for three minutes.

**Ms. Estelle Ah-Kiow (As an Individual):** Good afternoon. *Bonsoir.* I'm Estelle Ah-Kiow, the delegate from Mississauga—Lakeshore riding.

Today I'd like to talk to you about the importance of having more diversity in the realm of educational leadership. I believe that one of the greatest challenges facing the Canadian education system is the immense task of making sure that every student is equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to navigate our complex economies and worlds.

In designing effective education programs and policies, we need innovative thinkers who are able to view fundamental questions of education policy through a global and comprehensive lens and from a variety of vantage points. If we are serious about making sure that our education system works for everyone, we simply cannot afford not to fully tap into all our available human resources, half of whom are made up of women. Overall, the field of education is a woman-dominated one, with more than three-quarters of public school teachers being female; however, only 30% of school administrators are female, and the percentage of minority female administrators is only 6.8%.

[*Translation*]

Statistics show that the education sector tends to be more gender-balanced than other areas, even though full parity is a long way off.

What concerns me most, however, is the incredibly low number of women from visible minority groups. According to a Ryerson University study, the number is dropping every year.

[*English*]

As a young, female, visible minority school board trustee, I see this in motion in my own life. Let me tell you, when I go to national conferences I am often mistaken for an assistant or a staff member. I think this urgently needs to change.

[*Translation*]

The student population in our school boards is becoming increasingly diverse. Our schools are serving more and more new Canadians, immigrants, and refugees. Unfortunately, there is still a long way to go before school board leaders look like the students they are serving.

[*English*]

I believe that it's critical for us to have more diversity among the leaders whose decisions directly affect the next generation of Canadians.

•(1610)

[*Translation*]

I don't think it's possible to fully appreciate, on an organic level, what newcomers, particularly refugees and immigrants, go through, unless you have experienced it yourself. I think we need people who represent Canada's diverse makeup if the distinct needs of these communities are to be recognized and understood. That is why I firmly believe that more of the people running our schools and school boards need to reflect the diverse populations they serve.

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

[English]

We go now to Elinor McNamee-Annett, for three minutes.

**Ms. Elinor McNamee-Annett (As an Individual):** Thank you.

Today, there are only nine female leaders of government in the world. Two countries have gender parity in Parliament, Canada not being one of them, and despite women making up 47% of the workforce, only 5.3% of CEOs in Canada are women. Based on today's progress rate, it will take over 200 years for women to achieve equality in the workplace. That's not good enough.

I'm not here today to tell you that change needs to happen. None of us would be here if we didn't already know that to be true. I'm here to tell you that these issues cannot wait and that by focusing on diversity in leadership we can expedite that change together.

There will be many solutions needed to address an issue so vast as gender equality, but what the research so clearly shows us is that when women lead and are in positions of power, policies, norms, institutions, and mindsets change. By having women in these positions, we can expedite substantive change, but first we must focus on removing those seemingly insurmountable barriers.

I have had the privilege of supporting a program at the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade called the women's leadership circle. This past year, we collaborated with the WEB Alliance and the Province of B.C. to host one of North America's largest gatherings on gender equality, the We for She conference. Understanding that women play a key role in economic growth, this conference saw over 1,500 business leaders and young women in high school come together to discuss the challenges, successes, and practical actions to create gender equality in the workplace, all centred around the theme of empowering and championing the next generation.

One of the key action plans that arose from this conference was the need to promote and advocate for diversity. You see, when we broadly discuss barriers to leadership for women, there are more barriers than just gender that need to be addressed. Those policies, norms, institutions, and mindsets that are currently so deeply steeped in bias will not be changed unless diverse women are leading from the top.

I am so deeply grateful for the opportunity to testify in front of this committee today. However, I am also very cognizant of the fact that my voice is being heard because doors have been opened for me that have not been available to other women.

Even though I have faced my own barriers and challenges, the unfortunate truth is that women attaining those coveted leadership positions far too often look like me: white, middle-class, educated, cisgendered, able-bodied women. We cannot let the mistakes of history repeat themselves and allow this movement to be an exclusionary one. We won't get there unless we get there together, because none of us progress if some of us are left behind.

This is what I implore this committee. If you truly want to create substantive change, empower women to lead, but put diversity at the forefront of everything you do. When we have true diversity in leadership, change will come. However, we first need to focus on tangible policy solutions that break down barriers to leadership for all women. We need to do this now, and we need to do it together.

Thank you for your time.

**The Chair:** These are excellent speeches.

Now we're going to go into our round of questions. In order to give everybody a chance, we're going to go one party at a time, one question at a time until we run out of time.

We'll start with Ms. Vandenberg.

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

I want to thank all of you because you're all incredibly articulate and well researched, and you're making very compelling arguments. Thank you very much for testifying.

One of the things we have as elected leaders in this country is not just a voice but a megaphone, so the question we ask ourselves is which voices to amplify. You've made a very strong case that we need to make sure we're amplifying voices of diverse groups in our country.

My specific question is for Ms. deJong. Before I entered electoral politics, women in politics was what I worked on internationally as the manager of iKNOW Politics, and your research is absolutely correct. There are a number of studies showing that the gap between the number of men and women who even consider politics as an option, or have ever thought about politics, is actually getting larger among college-age men and women.

It seems that the younger generation, even though they are, in my view, more engaged politically in terms of their knowledge and their advocacy, are less likely to join political parties and run for office. What do you think we can do to reverse that, and what are the reasons why that might be happening?

• (1615)

**Ms. Victoria deJong:** I don't think I can speak for every single person in my generation, but for me and my social circles I think one of the biggest factors is a disillusionment in what they think government can do for them. They see a disconnect between government and how it serves youth. I think one way to fix that would be for parties to make an effort to reach out to more young people. You see a lot of campus political party organizations connecting more like that.

Just reaching out and consulting with young people about the policies that parties could put in place would serve those young people, because I think that a lot of times parties don't consider the youth vote as being a really strong force historically. Maybe now it's a little bit different. Making sure that youth are a priority would be the biggest thing.

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg:** Thank you.

We'll go around and then come back.

**The Chair:** Sure.

We'll go to Peter Kent for a question.

**Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC):** Thanks to all of you for very solid presentations, and to your counterparts from other ridings across the country.

To Melinda's point about cyber-bullying, this is a new and vicious phenomenon. Many of the politicians around this table have been subject to it in their own ways, although with the experiences of longer lives and greater experience we are probably better able to ignore some of the most vicious material that we see.

I was known as "pinhead" when I was in junior high school. I did avoid class on more than a few occasions for exactly that reason. Social media today is much more brutal and much more psychologically brutalizing. We certainly recognize that and it's something that I think we all have to address.

I would comment, Elinor, on your point about the seemingly insurmountable challenges. I came from the broadcasting industry, from journalism. I don't know how many conventions I went to in Canada where there was a panel whose members would ask, why don't we have women CEOs on these round tables? Women have become, in the broadcasting industry and in the print media—which is also my background—very senior managers, very capable executives.

However, for those ultimate positions, there is very much a quality of life consideration involved—sometimes family, but sometimes simply not wanting to get involved in these positions for the reasons we heard regarding the younger generation's not wanting to get down and dirty in what is still, in the political world, a not always pleasant environment.

I'm just wondering whether you have any thoughts on achieving that and, from your board of trade experience, whether you have any solutions. At one of the broadcasting conferences I went to—the Canadian Association of Broadcasters—when a male member of the panel, who is still a journalist today, was asked, how do we get more women CEOs in broadcasting, he said, "We'll just make them". Obviously it's an attitude that shouldn't fly. I'm just wondering what your thoughts on that might be.

**Ms. Elinor McNamee-Annett:** Sure. I think that's a very interesting question because when we are looking at women in those most senior levels of leadership, if they are having to make that choice, why aren't workplaces erasing that choice with policy? Why aren't they becoming more flexible to women's schedules? Why are those responsibilities falling to just women outside of the workplace?

Maybe there is a level of choice but I don't think that is the biggest barrier to women attaining the highest levels of the C-suites in leadership right now. Perhaps there absolutely is a lifestyle consideration with any of that, but I think there are ways that workplaces and employers can implement policy to make the workplace more accessible for women.

Just from a personal anecdote, I know that Pacific Blue Cross in B.C. specifically has put in place some really fantastic policies. Jan K. Grude, the CEO, sat on the Women's Leadership Circle when I was involved with that. He talked about how he worked individually with women in high leadership to really ask what they need to be supported. Sometimes it's child care. Sometimes it's that extra vacation time to take care of their families. It's a bigger question than a lifestyle decision.

I think we also need to start identifying talent in the workplace early and put mentorship in place and have CEOs and high level

executives mentoring women from early on. I don't think there's a single answer to your question. Yes, lifestyle might be a consideration, but I think there is a lot more to consider than just that.

• (1620)

**The Chair:** All right.

We'll go over to you, Ms. Malcolmson, for a question.

**Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP):** Thanks, Chair.

First, I want to raise my hands to the two hours of witnesses we had this morning from Daughters of the Vote. They were awesome—such strong work. I really want to thank you for your leadership on this issue.

From the New Democratic Party, on the question of political representation, 43% of our nominated candidates were women and 40% of our MPs were women. So you're quite right about the parallel. If we get women on the ballot, then the voters choose them. That rule for the NDP is an equity rule.

The membership of the riding association cannot go to a vote to choose their candidate until they can prove that they've exhausted all options to get disabled, racialized, or indigenous persons, or women. You can hit it on any of those marks.

We still have more work to do, though. There are, we know now, 338 more, plus all the other young women who were nominated who didn't get to come here. We know what wealth there is in the country.

I'd love to hear just quickly from each of you, maybe starting with Melinda, one thing that a political party could do that would make you more likely to say yes when you get approached by your riding association, whether it's to run as trustee, provincial, federal, or anything.

**Ms. Melinda Phuong:** For me, as a youth, having youth engagement is very critical. Also, because I'm a teacher, I think the way we engage youth right now is almost symbolic. We'll just say, "We'll add a youth to be at the table to talk about youth issues", and that's it. It's almost tokenism but for young people, whereas if we really want to engage youth, we need to start from the beginning. We need to incorporate them in all the decisions and not just say, "We'll make all of these and then you just show up at this event and you'll help out and you'll volunteer", and that's it.

For me, if I were a bit younger and starting off, to have more of that direct engagement in policies, in issues at stake, and to feel that I'm more proud of the process from beginning to when I decide to run would be a way to push me. Then I would feel that this party is actually devoted to helping youth and bringing on change and I'm included in this conversation.

**Ms. Sheila Malcolmson:** If you saw that as a younger person, you'd be more likely to say yes to being asked to stand for nomination.

**Ms. Melinda Phuong:** Yes.

**Ms. Sheila Malcolmson:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** It is now Ms. Pauzé's turn.

Do you have any questions you'd like to ask?

**Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ):** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I believe Ms. deJong was the one who brought the issue up, but the question could be for any of you.

Some countries try to encourage women to enter politics by imposing quotas. What are your thoughts on that approach?

In the workforce, many equal opportunity programs exist. I come from the education sector as well, and I have a labour background. We had an equal opportunity program at the union level, which sought to encourage women to run for president of their union.

Where do you stand on applying that approach to the political arena?

[*English*]

**Ms. Victoria deJong:** I'm not going to answer in French, just because I think I'm going to stumble over it.

As regards quotas versus no quotas, I'm personally not in favour of quotas. I think that's getting a little ahead of the problem. I feel that adding quotas would make people resent women more, just because if we went straight from 26% to 50% of the House of Commons being women, a lot of people would perceive that as stealing seats away from other people, even though that's likely not the case as women are very qualified.

It should be on the parties, and on perhaps Elections Canada, to incentivize parties running a gender-equal slate of candidates. I would prefer that, rather than having individual quotas and hoping that society follows. It's more important that we fix the systemic issues that surround women and people's perceptions of women candidates, and as that acceptance grows, let that reflect in the House of Commons—if that makes sense.

• (1625)

**The Chair:** Excellent.

Now to my Liberal colleagues. Do you have a question?

Ms. Nassif.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to begin by thanking the witnesses, who are truly remarkable. I want to thank them for their presentations.

My question is about violence against women. I imagine you've heard about two teenage girls who committed suicide, Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons. Their mothers appeared before the committee in the fall.

My question pertains to cyber violence and is for all of you. How has the use of the Internet and communication technologies expanded the scope, nature, and impact of violence against Canadians, particularly young women and girls?

[*English*]

**Ms. Melinda Phuong:** I didn't hear some of it.

[*Translation*]

Could you ask the question in English as well?

[*English*]

**Mrs. Eva Nassif:** Yes.

We had the mothers of two girls who committed suicide after being intimidated through cyber-violence.

What do you think the government can do to prevent cases like that from happening?

**Ms. Melinda Phuong:** Okay, thank you for your question.

I think the government can work together with schools and organizations to start promoting healthy relationships. It's the new way of looking at cyber-bullying. Instead of addressing ways to prevent cyber-bullying or ways to punish people who are aggressors, it focuses on healthy relationships early on, especially in schools. When we change that culture, we change much of how students treat each other. I think from that cultural shift, it will create more difference and bigger changes in the future.

Having that collaboration, having the open dialogue between government and organizations and school boards, and including teachers and students and the youth during this conversation, I think will go very far.

**Mrs. Eva Nassif:** At what age would you suggest that we have to teach young boys?

**Ms. Melinda Phuong:** From as early as they can understand. It should start from the very beginning.

Cyber-bullying is one form of trauma, but if we go into talking about sexual violence and all of those things, they all tie into each other one way or another. It's the culture that needs to be shifted, and at an age at which the boys and girls can understand. This could be kindergarten or grade 1. Bringing these in and simplifying it for them to be able to process the information would be very critical. To hear it when you're in grade 8 or grade 9 might be too late, since you've been told over and over when you were younger that this type of behaviour is okay. If you start from the younger age, then by the time you get to grade 9, that won't be an issue anymore.

**The Chair:** Excellent.

**Mrs. Eva Nassif:** You mean the concept of consent will be taught.

**Ms. Melinda Phuong:** Yes, teaching consent and cyber-bullying, and how it's not right to.... It's a form of violence against women too. It's done online, but it's the same thing. It's calling women the "c" word, or any of those words. Yes, starting from that early age is how you shift the culture.

**The Chair:** All right.

We're at the end of our time for this particular session, so we're going to change the witnesses. Thank you very much to the witnesses who were here, and we'll have our next four.

We will suspend until we get our next four witnesses.

• (1625)

(Pause)

• (1630)

**The Chair:** All right, we're back in session.

We're happy to have with us for this panel, Janelle Hinds from Mississauga Centre; Jayden Wlasichuk from Swan River—Dauphin—Neepawa; Stéphanie Pitre from Manicouagan; and Audrey Paquet from Rimouski—Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

Welcome, ladies. Each of you will have three minutes.

We'll begin with you, Audrey.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Audrey Paquet (As an Individual):** I'm going to speak in French.

**The Chair:** That's no problem; we have interpreters.

**Ms. Audrey Paquet:** That's great.

I am currently finishing my master's degree in philosophy, politics, and college education. In philosophy, one in every three students is a woman, and one in every four professors is a woman. You can count on one hand the number of female thinkers taught in prerequisite courses. That number is even more abysmal when you take into account visible minorities and non-western thought. Yes, thinking that is female and non-white is taught in universities, at least at a very minimum level. It is, however, presented only as optional material, as though white men were the only ones to have had thoughts that mattered, as though the thoughts of women and marginalized people concerned only feminists and minorities. That is how our university students are taught. That is how our language, knowledge, ideas, and approach to philosophy and social science are forged. That is how our societies, institutions, and policies are forged.

In light of that, we should ask ourselves this question. What makes these people and these ideas so threatening that they are marginalized to such a degree?

The upside of philosophy and social science is that they are also self-critical. A considerable amount of research today focuses on, what we call in the field, epistemic injustices. That was actually the thesis topic of one of the speakers who was here yesterday, Dawn Lavell-Harvard.

I'd like to take this opportunity to encourage the members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women to consult the work Canadian women have done on the subject. You will see that women

and marginalized people are challenging the status quo. We are the Daughters of the Vote. In Canada, we are also the daughters of all the history, culture, and institutions of our colonial ancestors. We must acknowledge that, as brave as they were, our ancestors were, for the most part, racist and sexist, especially those who forged our knowledge, culture, and institutions. The legacy of that domination is still alive today. You need only look to the growing social and economic disparity that is widening the gap between men and women, whites and minorities, rural and urban communities, east and west, and so on.

So-called marginalized people are not seen as holders of knowledge in their own right, having to pass instead for informers. Their ideas must therefore pass through the sons of the true knowledge holders and power wielders like you. In order to justify their position, the real scholars opt for reassuring paths within mainstream thought, paths that are very rare within marginalized communities. I would've liked to share some examples with you, but I'm afraid I would run out of time.

It is therefore important to recognize our assets, our privileges, and our lack of knowledge so that the different ideas and points of view of so-called marginalized people can be heard, understood, and reconciled. That way, we can sort out the causes and effects to genuinely address the various forms of suffering that all of our brothers and sisters experience. In so doing, we can take more specific action to deal with the suffering where it arises and where its effects can be mitigated.

This is 2017. There is no point staring at our own shadow in the depths of Plato's cave. Let us be courageous enough to scale its porous façade together to face the cruel light of day. Progress is not just for everyone else. Progress is social, it tackles suffering, and it affects each and every one of us in our individual realities. The time has come for soul-searching and a societal revolution.

Thank you.

• (1635)

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

Next, we will be hearing from Stéphanie Pitre.

You have three minutes.

**Ms. Stéphanie Pitre (As an Individual):** Good afternoon.

My name is Stéphanie Pitre, and I represent the riding of Manicouagan.

I'd like to begin my presentation with the following question. Why, in the 21st century, do men still make 29% more than women in Canada?

Successful women have to navigate a dual constraint. On the one hand, they have to behave like men in a working world built by men, and, on the other, they must remain women. Despite a strong showing in higher education, women are just as under-represented in leadership positions.

In Quebec's National Assembly, women account for less than a third of the legislature's members. Furthermore, a 2016 Leger survey revealed that only 18% of senior management positions were held by women. The main barriers associated with their lack of ambition are a lack of opportunity, a lack of self-confidence, and family obligations. When women have small children, they tend to work part-time jobs or leave the workforce for motherhood.

The income women earn is still considered supplementary, and overall, women are paid less than men. In a context where one parent has to stay home to look after the children, it makes sense for the lowest earner to stay home. Irregular work schedules and distance make the work-life balance harder for women interested in entering traditionally male-dominated occupations.

On the north shore, where I'm from, the Plan Nord strategy is widening the wage gap by creating more jobs for men.

How is it that men earn 29% more than women in the 21st century?

A society that values gender equality should put in place measures to address the gender gap in the workplace. It is an artificial gap, created by society. On the one hand, young girls are given dolls to play with, so that they can acquire the skills to raise children and take care of a family. On the other hand, young boys are given trucks to play with, promoting skills associated with the mining industry.

In a society in which the gender divide dominates the workplace, pay equity is a utopian idea. That is why I urge the government to adopt the following measures to ensure equal access to development opportunities on the north shore.

First, paternity leave should be made mandatory, in order to put an end to gender-based norms associated with the care-taking of small children.

Second, gender equality in positions of power should be promoted in the workforce.

Third, funding grants should be established to encourage women to work in male-dominated occupations, and vice versa.

All of these measures would ensure that my community's socio-economic development took women's employment and work-life balance needs into account, so that they are not dependent on their spouses.

I turned 24 this week. The best gift I, as well as all the women we will be honouring tomorrow, could ever get would be to work together to change society and adopt measures to achieve equal pay for women.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** That was great.

[English]

Now we'll go to Jayden for three minutes.

**Ms. Jayden Wlasichuk (As an Individual):** Good afternoon. My name is Jayden Wlasichuk, and I'm here representing Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa. I'm 19 years old and currently attend the University of Guelph, studying environmental governance and political science in my second year.

I'm here to talk about my experiences growing up as a woman in a non-traditional field, and the barriers that I faced, such as the gender roles and the expectations based on that, as well as our fear of judgment from stereotypes.

I had the opportunity to spend the last five years of my upbringing on a beef farm in rural Manitoba. I was on this farm with my two sisters and my dad for those five years. A lot of expectations, not only of myself but also of my sisters, were that we were the housekeepers. We were inside to cook, to clean, and to serve, not to work as equal members on the farm. However, that's not how my dad raised us. We were out on the farm and working with the livestock, and we got to participate fully. There were comments like, "You're going to make a great wife some day", which weren't the most inspirational to any of the three of us.

It was my experiences growing up in the 4-H Beef Club that really inspired me to be who I am today. The 4-H motto is to learn by doing. That's something that they teach, not only to the males but to the female members of the club as well. We are equal to our male counterparts, and we're able to take on the roles that are typically seen as more masculine and physically demanding. We're able to do these tasks to the exact same standards as our male counterparts, and we get to do this from a very young age.

Not only that, but the leadership within my club tended to lean more towards females. I had the opportunity to be one of the executive members of the club for three years, and it was during my three years on the executive that it was led mainly by females. That's something that I found not only empowering, but also inspiring. I knew that I could look back and see that those experiences would show the younger girls of the club that they could do whatever they set their minds to as well.

On top of that, my high school experience led me to be the only female in two of my courses. It was in these courses and in other experiences in my life that I was told that I was smart and successful and strong, for a girl. It took a lot of time and a lot of thinking and a lot of questioning before I was able to acknowledge that I am strong and I am successful and I am smart, regardless of my gender. Some of these experiences and the way I was raised showed me why that was possible.

Lastly, I want to talk about Skills Canada. This was an opportunity that showed me and other females my age in both secondary and post-secondary education that we can set our minds to and succeed in vocational areas across the board.

I'd like to end by saying that I was very privileged in the way I was raised and the opportunities I was presented with. I will leave you with this question: if I have been given these opportunities, and the success that I've had stems from these, what will become of girls from across Canada and across the world who don't have the privileges that I did?

• (1640)

**The Chair:** All right, now we'll go to Janelle for three minutes.

**Ms. Janelle Hinds (As an Individual):** Hi, my name is Janelle Hinds, and I'm the delegate representing Mississauga Centre. I'm honoured to have this opportunity to speak to the committee.

I feel I'm well positioned to talk about women in non-traditional fields, as I'm an engineer and entrepreneur. I did my degree in biomedical and electrical engineering at McMaster University and I'm also the founder of Helping Hands, which was a social enterprise to help youth at the high school level get engaged civically.

As an engineer, I wear my ring proudly, but I wear it because I have to. When I go to conferences and networking events that are geared toward technology or entrepreneurs, I am always assumed to be the administrative assistant, never the founder. I have been told countless times that I don't look like an engineer. Every time people say that, as a female and a person of colour, I feel I do not fit their stereotype of what an engineer is.

I have also worked at jobs where less technically qualified males were hired for positions and given a higher salary than mine.

Perceptions matter. I spend a lot of time reaching out to younger women to get them interested in STEM—science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. A lot of them just basically tell me they are not interested because they do not see role models and other people who look like them. These perceptions need to change. That's why I think initiatives like Minister Kirsty Duncan's choose science initiative should be expanded and developed further.

Women choose apprenticeships in fields like welding at a staggeringly low rate, but I believe these campaigns that show women the benefits of pursuing STEM by showcasing the impact they can make, while experiencing the economic security that these jobs provide, will help close the gender gap.

Barriers that women like me face in STEM are not limited to perception. For example, as a female and an entrepreneur, I face sexual harassment. I've had potential investors in my business make sexual overtures to me and drop all communication or harass me as soon as I resist, and this actually happened to me just last night.

At my alma mater I support women, many of whom have disclosed stories of sexual harassment and discrimination. It's hard for me to tell these women what course of action they should take. This is why one recommendation I have is that we start an initiative to show women, youth, and minorities what their rights are as workers.

I think the government should support more grassroots groups that support women in STEM and entrepreneurs, as well as encouraging businesses to get more involved with these organizations, because this will help create the trained, skilled workers whom companies will need to hire in the future, as well as closing the gender gap and helping women be self-sustainable and even thrive.

I call on the government to directly fund women through grants to start their businesses, with ongoing educational support. Women bring a different perspective into this field, and if Canada wants to have a strong economic future, women need to be involved more.

Thank you.

• (1645)

**The Chair:** That's excellent. You had me at engineer.

Now we're going to go into our round of questioning.

Omar, because Janelle is from your riding, I'm going to give you the privilege, if you have a question.

**Mr. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I haven't prepared a question, but first, it's a pleasure for me to be here to hear directly from our leaders in the community, as they provide us with an input we need to hear more often than we do currently. I learned a lot from the previous panel and this panel, and I'm grateful for the opportunity.

As someone who has also worked in start-ups, I'm very interested in hearing from entrepreneurs. Janelle, can you perhaps give us your thoughts and elaborate more about what you think government can do to help women entrepreneurs?

**Ms. Janelle Hinds:** I think a lot of it starts with funding better social enterprises. Of the people I meet as a social enterprise, a lot of them are women, and we struggle because we do not fit the traditional moulds, so going to VCs or angel investors is very difficult. Banks still do discriminate against women, especially youth. I don't really have the ability to go to the bank and ask for funding.

I think more grants are needed, and right now there aren't a lot of grants that are actually directly trying to fund women. I think that needs to happen, along with educational support.

The government does a lot through campus accelerators and regional innovation centres, RICs, directly funding women. I think every single campus accelerator and every single RIC should have a program to support women and have that safe space where they can talk about their businesses.

**The Chair:** All right.

Martin, we'll go to you for a question.

Oh, it's Kelly. All right.

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC):** Thanks very much, Madam Chair.

She's so pleased that you're an engineer because she is one herself. So there we go.

**Ms. Janelle Hinds:** Awesome.

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** The session this afternoon is entitled "women in politics" and "women in non-traditional work", but I guess as a female politician, I never thought that being a politician was a non-traditional role for women. Perhaps it's because a number of women I knew were serving as politicians.

I know that the definition of non-traditional work has changed over the last number of decades. Whereas it once may have included physicians and lawyers, and perhaps even leaders in corporations, it now includes those in construction, mining, and engineering, and I'll add ranchers to the list, as you mentioned.

I guess my question would be for you, Jayden, because toward the end of your comments you spoke about Skills Canada. You didn't really get a chance to speak too much about it. I would like to give you the opportunity to talk a little bit about that and how it's there to empower women in non-traditional roles.

**Ms. Jayden Wlasichuk:** Absolutely. I'm very excited to talk about that.

In my experience with Skills Canada, I actually only participated in my final year of high school. I sort of got roped into it at the end. I just said okay and did it. I had a great experience with it.

I'd had the opportunity in previous years to watch some of my friends participate in such things as job skills demonstration and workplace safety. There were also things like welding and electrical installations. It was at the national competition, which I was very privileged to get to compete in, that I had the opportunity to witness a young female stand up in first place, winning gold in an area where she was the only female competitor. I believe she was another grade 12 student. She had been working all of high school. I believe it was autobody painting. She had been painting cars for three days while we were there, and she ended up winning gold.

I watched another young woman step up onto that podium. She felt the odds were against her. As the only female in that category, she defied the odds. It wasn't the only sector in which females won.

In my experience, I did public speaking while I was there. That was a pretty female-dominated section. We had one male competitor out of 10, I believe. There were a few other sections that tended to lean more toward female competitors, but I had the opportunity to see females competing in electrical, in autobody painting, in refrigeration repairs, in air conditioner repairs. I didn't even know that those were things that post-secondary students, even high school students, would be able to compete in.

I got to watch and witness the empowerment of young women because their schools were able to sponsor them, send them, and have them compete, learn, and grow. The young women were able to be pushed toward their passions regardless of where they were leading them.

• (1650)

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Excellent.

Now we'll go to Ms. Malcolmson for a question.

**Ms. Sheila Malcolmson:** Thank you, Chair.

I really appreciate the panel's imagination and sharing of experiences. I'm really glad you're here. You're reminding me of one of my favourite quotes from the late, great Rosemary Brown. The previous panel reminded me of this as well. She said that we must open doors, and we must see to it that they remain open so that others may pass through.

You have a whole circle of members of Parliament here. The previous panel flagged how privileged we are. Give us some hints on how we can use that privilege to remove the barriers for this next wave of leadership. Tell me one thing that we could do to make it easier for you to pass through.

Let's start at the end with you, Audrey.

[Translation]

**Ms. Audrey Paquet:** Leading by example is important. That also means creating laws and policies that are rooted in the reservoir of knowledge that our universities have built, particularly in philosophy and social science, taking into account knowledge from a wider range of sources.

The contribution of philosophy and social science to our knowledge base is just as important as that of the environment or the economy. Social science encompasses many disciplines such as sociology and political science. Efforts have to be made to take all of that knowledge into account.

It is also crucial to listen to what certain groups and individuals have to say. Attention must be paid to those who reflect the population, not just those who serve our interests.

**Ms. Stéphanie Pitre:** I learned a lot at university. I have been privileged to have the opportunity to advance as far as I have in my studies. Feminism has taught me that, even though a woman may manage to pursue her studies and achieve higher education, she should not think other women would have just as easy of a time. It is also important for a woman not to push her oppression onto other women. If I had needed to ask immigrant Filipino women to look after my children so that I could do my studies, I would be transferring my oppression to other women. I really believe it's important to take those things into account.

In addition, men have to be part of the solution. Not only should they help women take their rightful place, but they should also make room for women, so that everyone can access positions of power and leadership. Those with the privileges need to understand that others can have privileges as well. Relinquishing their privileges does not necessarily lead to oppression.

[English]

**Ms. Sheila Malcolmson:** You mentioned pay equity also.

[Translation]

**Ms. Stéphanie Pitre:** Yes.

**Ms. Sheila Malcolmson:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Paucé, you have the floor.

**Ms. Monique Paucé:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

What I take away from your presentations is your strong social conscience with respect to differences in class, wealth, and so on. I find that quite compelling.

You talked about promoting gender equality. I can't recall which one of you brought it up. I also noted that one of the three of you cited the percentage of women in Quebec's National Assembly.

I'm going to pick up on the question I asked earlier. Without quotas, how can we promote gender equality? It may seem as though I am dwelling on this, but I asked the young women who were here before you the same question. I get the sense that a generational difference is at play. It is important to note that my generation fought for gender equality measures. You are my daughters' age. They don't see that as necessary, and a young woman told me the same thing earlier.

Is there a generational difference? Am I going to have to let this issue go?

• (1655)

**Ms. Stéphanie Pitre:** I agree with what my colleague said earlier. I would, however, add that, in order to have more women in positions of power, we need to see more women occupying those positions. Imposing gender equality through a fifty-fifty split could prove detrimental initially. Women could be perceived as taking men's place. Conversely, it would show women younger than I am that they have a place.

We may find ourselves in the space between two generations, where things are challenging. Women might think that they did not work for their place, but that it was given to them because governments were required by law to have more women within their ranks.

Gender equality is important because it allows women to be better represented. We have to work on the foundation. Men have always had the privilege of taking their place here. I think there is room for men and women. Right now, I don't feel that the male majority represents me because I am not a man.

**Ms. Audrey Paquet:** That's what I mean when I talk about changing the spirit of the law and leading by example. Not only should we impose a quota for women, but we should also have a quota for members of visible minorities. That would be possible if we changed the voting method. I have an opinion on that. I am in favour of a mixed member proportional system because it could fix many of the problems stemming from the under-representation of regions, women, and minorities.

Thank you.

[English]

**Ms. Janelle Hinds:** If I could just add to that, as a woman in the STEM field, I think one thing that isn't addressed is that they talk about maybe getting young women into STEM. There's something called the "pipeline". It's very leaky. I've been in the workforce for only a year, and I've already considered leaving it sometimes. Many women have told me they want to leave.

While we're addressing the younger side, I feel that we also need to make sure that instead of talking about quotas, we're talking about making sure that women stay in the STEM fields. Considering the sexism they face, a lot of them want to leave. That's why we have to make sure they understand what to do when they face sexual harassment in the workforce.

Also, for businesses, just as the government gives \$2 an hour as an incentive for companies to hire youth, it could do something similar for apprenticeships, so that if a company took on a female, for example, there would be an incentive for the leader to actually train her.

**The Chair:** Are there any final comments? Any question on the Liberal side? We only have two minutes.

**Ms. Anita Vandenbeld:** I'd just like to remark that you're all phenomenal. I want to thank you all for coming here and spending the time in preparing to speak to us. We are going to listen very carefully to your words, and we're very much looking forward to seeing you this evening at the gala. The all-party women's caucus is having a reception beforehand from six until seven. For my colleagues, parliamentarians, and also for all the Daughters of the Vote, we're very much looking forward to that.

**The Chair:** I would echo her comments. You are excellent witnesses and it's some of the best testimony we've heard.

Ms. Nassif has a comment.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Eva Nassif:** I encourage all of you to enter politics and to run in the next municipal or provincial election. You have everything it takes.

If you were to enter the political arena, what objectives would you set to make the system equally accessible to all so that everyone was considered equal?

You can each have a minute to respond.

**Ms. Audrey Paquet:** I think political change can also happen outside political parties strictly speaking. There are a host of places where people can become socially active. Movements have emerged and people can get involved. It is also possible to take up various causes. That way, people don't have to toe a party line or principles they don't necessarily agree with. It's very hard for young women to join political parties governed by very strict guidelines that aren't right for them.

• (1700)

**Mrs. Eva Nassif:** So, we let it go.

In the meantime, should we not persevere and push forward passionately, with everything we have?

**Ms. Audrey Paquet:** We should persevere, but—

**Mrs. Eva Nassif:** We should not wait until we achieve equal footing with men. As far as my generation goes, there was no paved road that made things easy for us. It took hard work, perseverance, and passion to break down the barriers. At least that was my experience. I urge you to keep your involvement going, even though we have not yet achieved equality.

**The Chair:** That was great. What a good question.

Thank you very much.

[English]

You are excellent witnesses and we look forward to hearing more from you.

Just to give you some feedback from today, I heard from many of the MPs who were at the various sessions that these were the best witnesses of any we've heard to date. So thank you very much. We'll see you at the gala.

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The meeting is adjourned.





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