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Chair

Mr. Bryan May

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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● (0845)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.)): Seeing the clock at 8:46, I call the meeting to order.

Good morning, everybody. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, June 13, 2016, the committee is resuming its study on poverty reduction strategies.

We are currently in the first theme of the study, government administered savings and entitlements programs. This is the fifth and last meeting for this particular theme.

Joining us today, we have Ian Lee, associate professor from Carleton University.

Welcome.

From Canada Without Poverty, we have Harriett McLachlan, president of the board of directors; and Leilani Farha, executive director.

Welcome to both of you.

I think we still are having technical difficulties, but hopefully we'll be joined shortly by Kendra Milne, director, law reform, from the West Coast LEAF Association, coming to us via videoconference from Vancouver, British Columbia.

In the interest of time, we're going to get started with witness statements.

Can you keep the statements to seven minutes? If you want, I can give you a one-minute warning.

We'll start with Mr. Ian Lee, associate professor from Carleton University.

Welcome, sir.

Dr. Ian Lee (Associate Professor, Carleton University, As an Individual): Thank you.

I thank the committee for inviting me to appear before you today, because I have a very personal interest in this subject. In 1971, exactly 45 years ago this year, I dropped out of grade 12, and by any measure, I was below the poverty line. I was frequently unemployed, and I was certainly always earning minimum wage when I was employed; and I remained in that status until I returned to school as a mature student a couple or three years later.

First, here are my disclosures. As you mentioned, I'm an associate professor, tenured, at Carleton, in the Sprott School where I teach business strategy and public policy. Second, I do not belong to or donate any monies to any political party. Third, I'm not a registered lobbyist under the Lobbying Act. I don't represent anyone anywhere, except myself. Fourth, I've taught approximately 100 times in developing countries around the world since 1991.

What I'm going to talk about today is based on a meta literature review, a peer-reviewed article by me and Sprott Chancellor Professor Vijay Jog, concerning the Canadian public retirement income system. It was published by the *Journal of Public Finance and Management*. I'm also drawing on another peer-reviewed article that I wrote, which was published this year in *How Ottawa Spends* and focused on the policy and vertical issues in the reform debates surrounding CPP. I'm going to expand on that and generalize from that.

Finally, I'll also draw on my op-ed published two years ago for *Ottawa Business Journal*, which was called “The Benefits of a Lower Minimum Wage”.

As someone who is relentlessly evidence-based, relying on evidence from StatsCan, OECD, and OECD government departments, I want to provide some background empirical data concerning wealth, incomes, and poverty in Canada. I do this due to what I believe is a substantial amount of misinformation and misunderstanding in the public today concerning poverty in Canada, due to what I characterize perhaps a little facetiously as Trumpisms, made-up statements lacking any empirical basis.

I do have the background data for this, which I will provide to the committee after. I have the actual source data from StatsCan and the OECD, and so forth.

Restated, contrary to what has been reported widely, poverty is not skyrocketing and it's not exploding in Canada. It's real, it's there, but it's not exploding and it's not skyrocketing. Income inequality is not exploding or skyrocketing in Canada. I have the OECD data on that. Incomes are not stagnant in Canada per StatsCan.

First, the overall Canadian income data is in a comparative context. I provide this to my students every year and they're just simply astonished. This is based on 2011, because there's a lag when you're using OECD. Canada's average GDP per capita, our income per capita, expressed in U.S. dollars, because the OECD converts everything into U.S. dollars so you can compare across countries, was $44,000 U.S. The EU average at that time was $36,000 U.S.; that's the EU-28. The eurozone average was $38,000. The OECD overall average was $38,900. So Canada was averaging and is averaging about 20% higher than the European Union, which of course we know is one of the wealthiest places in the world.

Turning to Canadian poverty rates, we discover they're at the lowest level ever in Canadian history, at approximately 8.8%. In my lifetime, from the 1960s until now, poverty has collapsed. That's not to say it's disappeared. Of course, it hasn't, and there's more work to do, but it's certainly not going up.

Then we examine inequality; Canada is below the OECD average. That's never reported. We get the impression that we're skyrocketing and we're above everybody else. That's simply not true. Then we examine outer poverty in Canada and discover what we all know, that it has been collapsed since the 1960s. Whether you use the LICO or the LIM, whether it's households or single people, it's collapsed.

Again, according to the OECD, Canada has one of the lowest rates of elder poverty in the entire world. There is only a handful of countries that have a lower poverty rate than we do.

Turning to my research on the retirement income system, my overarching message is that Canada and other OECD countries go forward into a new world of significantly reduced economic growth due to the aging of the population, which will inexorably lead to diminished taxation revenues, as Minister Morneau is going to tell us this afternoon. We can no longer squander scarce public resources on frivolous policies, of which universality is exhibit A.

Our meta literature review of the Canadian retirement income system showed that Canada has one of the lowest levels of elder poverty in the world per OECD pensions, at a glance. Moreover, a consensus of Canadian researchers such as Professor Milligan of UBC, Jack Mintz in Calgary, and even Bob Baldwin from the Canadian Labour Congress find that approximately 80% of Canadians not yet retired are in fact pension-ready, and that the problem is not in the bottom two quintiles but in the middle and upper-middle quintile. This cries out for a targeted solution, not a universal, one-size-fits-all policy.

My second message to this committee—and I'll be winding up right now—is probably going to be very different from that of most witnesses who will argue that we simply need to spend more money to solve our problem. I want to first note that I am not here before your committee asking for more money for my interest group, for the universities. Not at all.

Rather, I hope and urge that the committee can think about how we can grow the economic pie through restructuring policies such as the elimination of protectionist barriers, such as were advocated by the advisory committee to Minister Morneau, rather than simply redistributing the pie or rearranging the chairs on the deck of the *Titanic* in this brave new world of much lower economic growth.

Thank you.

● (0850)

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir.

Now, from Canada Without Poverty, we have Harriett McLachlan, president of the board of directors.

Welcome.

Ms. Harriett McLachlan (President, Board of Directors, Canada Without Poverty): Thank you for inviting Canada Without Poverty to appear at this important study of poverty reduction strategies.

CWP is a federally incorporated charitable organization dedicated to the elimination of poverty in Canada. Since our inception in 1971 as a national anti-poverty organization, we have been governed by people with direct lived experience of poverty, whether in childhood or as adults. This lived experience of poverty informs all aspects of our work.

I'm the president of CWP, and I have lived most of my life in poverty. I'm joined in my comments by CWP's executive director and United Nations special rapporteur on the right to housing, Leilani Farha.

I've reported many times before committees, and still poverty persists. Canada Without Poverty can provide all the statistics that you need to understand the persistence of poverty, homelessness, and hunger in Canada, the country with the tenth-highest GDP in the world, when we spend 5% to 6% of our GDP on maintaining poverty.

This morning, allow me to tell you about the actual lies behind these statistics. My poverty started when I left my middle-class yet abusive home at the age of 16, in 1978. My siblings and I were beaten from early childhood, and I was sexually violated by my father from the age of nine until I left home. These early experiences were crippling and devastating. I slowly fumbled along trying to make my way, and eventually married, yet to someone who was abusive and following the familiar pattern that some broken people live. I then became a single parent with three children.

Today I'm an educated professional with a master's degree, and have worked for over 20 years in my field. As a single parent, I faced obstacles and lived in deplorable conditions. I made hard choices between paying a hydroelectric bill and getting food, not to mention not having any money to save for the future. I did not have a bedroom of my own. We lived with sewer rats in our home, in our living space, in my kitchen, and even in my children's beds. I could not afford to live in a better place.

My poverty has been persistent. It has not collapsed. It has existed since 1978. Though mine is a personal story, the roots are systemic and bridge the lives of 4.9 million others living in poverty. At various times, members from every political party have said directly to me that they care about poverty, and I believe them.

So please understand that my poverty is a violation of my human rights.

United Nations treaty bodies have recently instructed Canada that we are in violation of our international human rights obligations to ensure an adequate standard of living, including the right to food and housing. The consequences of poverty, homelessness, and hunger are severe. Consider that in Hamilton, Ontario, a 21-year difference was found between the life expectancy of the poorest and that of the wealthiest residents of the city. In January 2015, two homeless persons died in Toronto, Ontario, due to cold weather, poverty, and a lack of adequate housing.

● (0855)

Ms. Leilani Farha (Executive Director, Canada Without Poverty): Good morning.

I am Leilani Farha, the executive director of Canada Without Poverty, and the UN special rapporteur on the right to adequate housing.

I am going to pick up where Harriett left off, on this idea that poverty is a violation of human rights, and I'm going to try to give it some life and some meaning.

My starting point, and I think our baseline here in this room, must be that poverty is a violation of human rights. In fact, this committee, in a previous incarnation, already made this connection—and I can provide that reference for you—and the Senate committee, in its study “In From the Margins”, also came to that conclusion and has made that recommendation for going forward.

As Harriett said, the United Nations has told Canada repeatedly that we need a national poverty-reduction strategy based in human rights.

I'm going to use that as our starting point and take it as a given. I think there are two reasons that human rights keep coming up with respect to poverty reduction in this country.

I think the first reason is that it's understood that it is a violation of human rights and it therefore requires a human rights response. That only makes sense.

I think there is another reason, which is that our ad hoc policy approach to date hasn't worked. We may agree that poverty is not escalating, but it is persisting. This has been a problem in Canada for a very long time now, for too long for such a rich country.

An approach that might actually work is being suggested, and that's the human rights approach. When I mention human rights and you think that I'm the UN special rapporteur, you start thinking about Geneva, croissants, coffee, and highfalutin ideas. But in fact, human rights is a way of governing. It's a way of doing business, and there are some hallmark characteristics to a human rights approach to addressing poverty that I can provide for you.

First of all, it suggests a holistic approach, an all-of-government approach, so you're not looking at just this social policy, or this housing program, or this child benefit, but you're looking at a whole-of-government approach. You're looking at the decisions that are happening in finance, the decisions that are happening in defence and in security, and at how those are having an impact on the poverty in the country.

The other characteristics are pretty straightforward. A poverty-reduction strategy would actually make explicit reference to international human rights obligations. It would include people like Harriett and others with lived experience of poverty in the development, monitoring, and implementation of the strategy. You would develop measurable goals and timelines. You would make the strategy a budget priority. You would include monitoring and reporting mechanisms for the implementation of the strategy. There would be accountability and review mechanisms for the strategy. And you would provide a claiming mechanism to ensure rights-holders have a place for their concerns to be heard.

In my opinion those are pretty practical, straightforward, actually easy-to-implement recommendations.

I'm going to close here. In my job as special rapporteur, I have the opportunity to travel the world and meet with governments and ministries in countries, developed and developing. One of the two biggest fears I hear around a human rights approach to poverty, homelessness, and inadequate housing, is: “This is going to cost us way too much money. We don't have the resources”. Under international human rights law, the standard is actually a reasonableness standard. It's a maximum of available resources standard. It's a progressive realization standard. It's not to end homelessness tomorrow. It's to put in place what you need to do to end homelessness over time. It's using the resources that you, as a wealthy nation, actually have going forward.

The other big fear is the claiming mechanism, but this is essential. If we believe that something is a human right, we have to be able to claim that right. That's a principle in international human rights law. Here in Canada we have the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. If my free expression is being curtailed or I feel it's being curtailed, I can use that charter. The fear is that if we say, “Oh, poverty is a violation of human rights”, we're going to have 4.9 million people knocking on our door.

● (0900)

That's not the experience of other countries. When you as a nation build a culture of human rights within the nation, then people know that their rights are being respected, and people don't have to make claims, because they're enjoying their human rights.

I'll leave it there. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, both of you.

Kendra Milne is the director of law reform with West Coast LEAF. She joins us from Vancouver, British Columbia

Welcome. If you could keep your remarks to seven minutes that would be fantastic. Thank you.

Ms. Kendra Milne (Director, Law Reform, West Coast LEAF): Thank you so much, and thank you for inviting me to appear today. As you said, I'm here in Vancouver on the unceded land of the Coast Salish peoples, and particularly the Squamish, Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh peoples.

As the introduction noted, I work at West Coast LEAF, which is a non-profit organization that seeks to achieve equality by changing historic patterns of discrimination against women through litigation, law reform, and public legal education. We have a particular expertise in how poverty and economic insecurity impact the human rights of women.

Prior to my work at West Coast LEAF, I worked for another legal non-profit in Vancouver for eight years, where I provided legal services to thousands of people living in poverty, and I also worked on systemic law and policy changes concerning income security and housing security issues in British Columbia.

Today my comments are based on my experience of working directly with women living in poverty. I'd like to briefly address two topics related to women's poverty and the ways in which it undermines their human rights. I will then provide some suggestions for federal action to meaningfully address women's poverty in Canada and thereby support their equality.

The first issue I'd like to explore is the impact of caregiving performed by women on their economic security, and I suggest that this role as caregiver is intimately tied to women's experiences of poverty. We know that women continue to perform the vast majority of unpaid caregiving work for children. That work, in the absence of an adequate and affordable child care system, leads to significant implications for their economic security.

We know that in Canada women earn less than men do in full-time annual earnings, which is a gap that has been largely stagnant, if not growing slightly, and a gap that is worse for indigenous, disabled, and racialized women. When families with children of any income level struggle to afford or find child care, as they do, they may sacrifice the paid employment of the lower earner, often a woman, in order to fill gaps in child care or reduce the costs of care.

This is reflected in the fact that women work a disproportionate amount of minimum wage, part-time and precarious jobs, which means that their overall employment income, going beyond the comparison of just full-time, annual earnings, is significantly less than that of men. For women parenting as part of a couple, this means that they are increasingly financially dependent on their partner, even when both parties would prefer a more equal relationship, which puts women at risk of plunging into poverty if the relationship breaks down.

For women parenting alone, we know that the cost of child care is often an insurmountable barrier to employment because, given that the costs of child care are as high as they are, they cannot realistically earn enough to pay for care and other basic necessities. Many women are forced to rely on income assistance and live in deep poverty because of inadequate assistance rates or other forms of financial dependence.

Caregiving impacts women's financial security throughout their lives. With overall lower employment earnings, women accumulate lower pensionable earnings and retirement savings, and they continue to disproportionately live in poverty later in life. The scenario is increasingly problematic for older women who care for their grandchildren or other children, which is a situation we know is common, particularly in indigenous communities, because benefit schemes for older adults do not account for or support this caregiving.

Women's poverty is deeply intertwined with their role as caregivers, which reflects structural discrimination and undermines their equality. For any poverty reduction strategy to meaningfully support women out of poverty, it must reflect this fact.

The second issue I'd like to comment on is the connection between women's poverty and their vulnerability to violence, particularly in relationships. As I mentioned, women parenting as part of a couple often become financially dependent on their partner as a result of their role as unpaid caregiver. This financial dependence creates a power imbalance that we know puts women at an increased risk of relationship violence. It also makes it incredibly difficult for them to leave an abuser, because they face incredible obstacles to establishing security and independence.

Women experience poverty differently than men do. For example, despite being more likely to live in poverty and be housing-insecure, women are drastically under-represented in homelessness counts. Shelters and street sleeping are often unsafe for women, and because they will not put their children into those situations, deep poverty and homelessness look different for them. It often means couch surfing or relying on others for temporary housing. For many women, it means entering into relationships they would not otherwise choose to be in simply to get a roof over their head or the heads of their children. Again, these kinds of relationships, with deep imbalances of power and potential for exploitation, put women at an increased risk of experiencing violence, and compromises their security and their dignity.

Finally, I would like to make suggestions for action the federal government can take to meaningfully address women's poverty in Canada, and thereby support their equality and human rights.

First, the federal government can and should take a leadership role on a comprehensive national poverty reduction strategy that goes beyond piecemeal solutions and looks at the various causes and solutions of poverty in an inclusive and interconnected way that uses the human rights lens. The issues are often areas of mixed or solely provincial constitutional jurisdiction, but the federal government can and should utilize earmarked or conditional funding to ensure that poverty is meaningfully addressed across the country. Such leadership must take place in a transparent way with input from communities, experts, and other stakeholders.

● (0905)

Second, as part of the national poverty reduction strategy, the federal government can use a human rights lens and, in particular, a gender equality lens, to review existing and new federal laws and policies in terms of their implications for women's equality and economic security. For example, there are multiple developments occurring now on issues ranging from reforms to El parental leave benefits to the national early learning and child care framework to the national housing strategy, which appear to be proceeding absent a human rights lens and, in particular, without a lens focused on the impacts on women, despite the fact that we know that all of these issues are crucial to women's economic security and equality.

In addition, existing laws like the Divorce Act, federal seniors' benefits, and many other things have serious implications for women's economic security. Developing a rights-based review framework will provide a road map to move forward to financially support the security of all women, which is crucial for their dignity and equality.

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

● (0910)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you to all of our witnesses today.

We're going to move directly to questions from members.

First up is Monsieur Poilievre.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Thank you to the witnesses.

We know that the major determinant of poverty is whether someone is able to secure a job. The existence of government programming to help people who are unemployed ultimately exists to provide an income to people who would probably rather have their own income, so it should be the objective of any policy that combats poverty to enable people to work and establish their independence. But the income systems the government has in place, and the tax rates we impose on people on a combined federal-provincial basis, in many instances, make work a negative economic decision. In other words, individuals are worse off if they go into the workforce than they would be if they stayed unemployed.

My question is for Dr. Lee.

Do you have any comments on what the federal government can do to reduce what economists call the marginal effective tax rates, or the penalties that people face when they go to work?

Dr. Ian Lee: I agree with you simply because the peer-reviewed research is very clear on this. Professor Milligan of UBC has published extensively about the disincentives to returning to work. So has Professor Mintz at the University of Calgary. So has my colleague just down the road, at the University of Ottawa, Professor Ross Finnie. He has published on this extensively. We have been debating this and discussing this in public policy literally since I was in graduate school in the early 1980s. There is no question that there are barriers in the way we claw back income assistance when people return to work. But I just really want to go beyond your question, if you will, because this is my pet—

All of the discussions and the excellent suggestions by my colleagues here are great, but they are all symptoms. They are not the disease, and the disease to me is—and of course, I'm a convert, as I'm sure you know, as someone who dropped out of school and went back to school—that poverty is unbelievably correlated to low levels of education. I know I've said this to anti-poverty researchers, and they get very angry. I have the data showing the incredible correlation. I present it every September and every January to every one of my students in the first class.

By the way, the data sets are from two places. One is called the United States Census Bureau and the other is called Statistics Canada. They are showing that people with low incomes, in poverty, overwhelmingly have low levels of education. I didn't say it's perfect. It's not one for one. But the correlation is astonishing to anybody. Ross Finnie, who is certainly considered by many to be a progressive researcher, has come to a very similar conclusion. So we should be focusing on targeting hard-core unemployed people, or people with skill sets that are not needed anymore, for retraining.

The people supporting Trump are there because they can't make it in the economy, and so we have to retrain the people who can't make it. We should be talking about retraining, retraining, retraining, retraining for those people. Poverty is unbelievably correlated to low levels of education, and I'm exhibit A. I certainly wouldn't be a professor if I were still a grade 12 dropout, and I think that's very clear to everybody in this room.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: That's an inspiring story. We want to hear more stories about people who start from positions of extreme disadvantage but through their hard work and their own diligence are able to climb the ladder. We have to make sure though that we don't create a ladder that has missing steps in it. Right now in our tax and benefits system, there are missing steps.

For example, in the province of Alberta, if you are a disabled person trying to get into the workforce, and you increase your hours of work at minimum wage from 10 hours to 30 hours, you lose money. You make less money working 30 hours a week than you do working 10 hours a week. You have this person, who's desperately trying to get out of poverty and doing all of the right things, but being punished for it. That's a combination of federal-provincial tax and benefit penalties, and we need solutions. I'm hoping that we're going to have witnesses who can provide us with some solutions to that exact problem.

I wonder if you have any that you can offer.

● (0915)

Dr. Ian Lee: Let me follow up and again bring back in my theme.

If someone is on social assistance, they cannot go back to school. They will be cut off. Can you imagine? We should be telling every person on social assistance, please go back to school. We will pay your tuition fees, for goodness' sake.

We have these barriers built in.

It's not just on the income side, Mr. Poilievre. It's on the re-education side. We prevent people who are receiving social assistance or unemployment insurance from going back to school because we threaten to cut them off. We should be saying, "We encourage you and we will shout from the mountaintops to have you go back to school while you're on social assistance or on unemployment insurance", but we don't. We put these huge barriers in to prevent them from becoming educated, and that is really bad. That's wrong.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: My question is for the other two witnesses.

There are a lot of things that government does that make housing more expensive—excessive red tape, fees, delays in municipal approvals for housing, particularly housing appropriate for people on a low income.

Do you have any suggestions about how we can remove that red tape and those government-imposed barriers, so the marketplace can build more affordable housing for people?

The Chair: Your time is actually up, but I'm going to give you just a few seconds to respond.

Ms. Leilani Farha: Thanks for the question.

There is a lot that the government and governments—I use the plural because, of course, housing is a multi-jurisdictional issue. It's the federal government, as well as the provincial government, as well as municipal governments. There's a lot that can be done to improve the housing conditions for the lowest-income folks in Canada.

We know we need to build more social housing, for example. That's the throw-away. I find that to be a longer-term vision. It's not something that's going to happen overnight and it's not an immediate solution.

I think we need to start regulating markets and the real estate industry. I think it's an unsavoury and unpalatable suggestion. I think it's a difficult thing to make that suggestion when housing is viewed as a commodity.

Vancouver and British Columbia have started to move in that direction to address what is clearly a housing crisis for both the middle class and those in the lowest-income brackets. I think those are bold moves, but I'm not sure they are going to be enough. I think we need a national housing strategy that's based on human rights. I know the government is in the midst of working on such a thing. I think we need to address homelessness immediately, as an urgent matter, as a matter of priority.

The Chair: We have to move on. Sorry. Thank you. Maybe somebody else will ask you a question about that, because you sound as though you have a few more suggestions.

I want to move to Mr. Long.

Go ahead, Mr. Long

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our presenters today. I think they were all very good presentations.

I certainly want to acknowledge your presentations, Ms. McLachlan, Ms. Farha, and Ms. Milne. You are living with this situation every day and certainly have a first-hand account of what's going on.

My question is for you, Ms. McLachlan and Ms. Farha initially, regarding the alignment of government. Your organization has written about the lack of a federally mandated reduction strategy, and the result of that is that provinces and municipalities step up and try to reduce poverty in their own ways.

I would like you to comment on the importance of the alignment among the federal government, provinces, municipalities, community leaders, and corporate bodies in helping to reduce poverty, and to hear any ideas you might have.

Ms. Leilani Farha: Thanks for the question.

Yes, it's absolutely essential that there be some coordination, bearing in mind the sensitivities around federal jurisdiction versus provincial jurisdiction. But there's no doubt that we should at least be striving for some kind of national standards. I actually think the federal government could be showing some real leadership and not just taking its hat off to commend the provinces, all except B.C., and territories on what they have set out to do to reduce poverty, which is a great thing. That's wonderful, but there isn't any national organizing principle or framework, which I think is an essential ingredient to getting this right across the country, bearing in mind regional and provincial differences, of course.

I think the way in which the national-level government could show leadership is through human rights. That could provide that universal framework that all other provincial, and territorial, and even municipal strategies could fall under so that those would be the benchmarks that you're trying to hit, the human rights benchmarks. And you wouldn't be micromanaging provinces, territories, and municipalities. You're only saying, “We as a national-level government, having international human rights obligations, have to make sure we're all meeting those obligations, so, provinces, territories, and municipalities, here are the human rights benchmarks. Go.” Of course, you should be adequately resourcing the provinces, territories, and municipalities to ensure that they can meet those benchmarks.

I think that's an interesting way forward. There's no doubt that federalism is complicated. I think that any strategy has to grapple with the complications. I notice, as I scan the country, some really interesting developments at the municipal level and creativity at the local level, because they are so close to the people who are experiencing poverty, homelessness, and inadequate housing, terrible work conditions, etc. I think harnessing that creativity and ensuring that it flourishes in this country is important.

● (0920)

Mr. Wayne Long: Ms. Milne, do you have any comments on the alignment of all three levels of government?

Ms. Kendra Milne: I would just echo those comments. In B.C., which is a province that of course is lagging with respect to adopting a poverty reduction strategy, we see that it's really more a matter of downloading the issues to municipalities. There are great, creative solutions coming out of, for example, Vancouver, but when we see really high and disproportionate rates of poverty in northern B.C., we're dealing with much smaller municipalities that simply don't have the resources to take on the same kinds of actions that a municipality like Vancouver has. So I would really echo the comments regarding the role of the federal government in really playing a leadership role both to set standards and to try to negotiate with—within, of course, the boundaries of federalism—some of the provinces that are less willing to take a proactive approach to these issues.

Mr. Wayne Long: There's one thing I have a comment on. I think at times it's not always about spending more money. It's about working with the province, the municipalities, to make sure that money is effectively spent. I'll give you an example. The homeless shelter in Saint John, New Brunswick, is run by a non-denominational group called Outflow. It receives money from the provincial government to run a homeless shelter. It has to privately fundraise two to three times as much as it receives from the province to make the shelter work. The shelter is overflowing. It's in crisis, and we find that the workers now are Big Brothers, police, health care workers, and social workers; they're everything, and the stress on these shelters is really unbearable. What in your opinion could we do as a federal government to help give some relief to those most vulnerable, those on the street and living in shelters? Can you also comment on the way out of shelters to transitional housing?

Ms. Leilani Farha: Sorry, are these questions for us or...?

Mr. Wayne Long: They are for you and for you, Ms. Milne.

Ms. Leilani Farha: I just wanted to give her the opportunity. She's in a disadvantageous position.

Would you like to commence, given that there's a direct relationship with what you discussed with respect to women?

Mr. Wayne Long: Ms. Milne, you can go first.

Ms. Kendra Milne: I would simply add that I think the kinds of support that are necessary for women are a bit different. As I said, we tend not to see women in homeless shelters in a representative way that is proportional to the way we know they're experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness. I would stress that, for us, the big issue is looking at how to prevent the crisis in the first place. It's less about a band-aid solution. Of course, right now organizations like the one you're talking about are struggling, but the solution is not, in my view, to just increase emergency shelter beds. The solution is to look at why people are ending up in that situation in the first place and then back up a few steps. For women, it's a question of their overall financial security. So all of the things connected to their [*Technical difficulty-Editor*] to the labour force and in their economic security, tied to caregiving and other issues like the wage gap, have to be addressed, because band-aid solutions are simply not going to address these matters.

● (0925)

The Chair: Thank you very much. Unfortunately, we have to move on, but hopefully we'll come back again. We keep cutting you off. I apologize.

We've going to move to MP Sansoucy.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank all the witnesses. They have all shown us how important federal leadership is, especially as regards poverty among aboriginal peoples, as well as the importance of working with community organizations in the field, whether municipal or provincial. Ms. Milne also pointed this out.

We are talking about daycare, caregivers and violence, as well as education, which is under provincial jurisdiction. Education, which must be addressed in various programs, is important, but it is hard for either children or adults to succeed at school if they show up with an empty stomach, if they move several times per year, or if the people around them are dealing with job loss or mental health issues.

My first question is for Ms. McLachlan.

Thank you for your presentation. You demonstrated the depth of your commitment and also stressed that, in the committee's study on poverty, our analysis must not focus on individuals, since that necessarily leads to inappropriate decisions. You argued that we should take a systemic approach to poverty.

In this first topic of our study, we are looking at all income security programs. If I understand correctly, we must first establish the issue of rights.

Would one way of doing this be to include the criterion of social condition in the Canadian Human Rights Act?

[*English*]

Ms. Harriett McLachlan: What's the question around that?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Social condition is not currently a criterion in the Canadian Human Rights Act.

Should it be one?

[*English*]

Ms. Harriett McLachlan: Yes, absolutely.

On the social condition, we know about the social determinants of health. We know about all the outplay of this. It has to be comprehensive and systematic, based on human rights.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Would you like to add something, Ms. Farha?

[*English*]

Ms. Leilani Farha: I would only add that social condition has been recognized across the country in many human rights acts, at the provincial and territorial level, as a ground of discrimination. It's clear that it is a matter of human rights. One's social condition has an impact on how one is treated in our society, unfortunately.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Ms. Farha, with regard to income security programs, poverty must be addressed in terms of costs. We must make better use of the available resources. I am not sure if that is what you are saying, so I would ask you to elaborate on this.

What exactly do you mean with regard to the use of resources?

[*English*]

Ms. Leilani Farha: Thank you.

International human rights law says that state governments have to realize economic and social rights progressively, that is, over time. They can't sit back and put their feet up on the table. They have to realize that it takes progressive steps, and they have to use their maximum available resources.

In a country as wealthy as Canada, we may cry poor at times. In light of our historic wealth, we may cry poor now, for example, compared to other countries. We have the 10th largest GDP in the world so we're doing pretty well.

In light of that wealth, we have to use our maximum available resources. That's been defined as the money that is available. It has also been defined as the money that could be available and isn't available. What tax rates are being used? Who's being taxed and at what rate? Are corporations being taxed?

The tax base itself becomes open for exploration. The United Nations doesn't micromanage states. They say only that you need to be looking at all of your potential sources of funding. That's what maximum available resources means.

The question that governments should be asking themselves is whether we are meeting that criterion. There may be a defence for Canada to say, "You know what? We are actually spending a fair bit on social expenditures, but we're not getting the bang for our buck, and maybe we should be doing this differently somehow." That's a legitimate position for the government to take. They would have to defend that position, but it's a possible position.

People always worry that social and economic rights require a huge expenditure. They really don't. They ask for a reasonable expenditure to the maximum of available resources in light of all of the demands on a country. It's not a matter of not spending anything on security or defence and putting it all in the social and economic realm. That's not what international human rights say. They say that it has to be reasonable.

Obviously, a state has many competing demands. We have 4.9 million people living in poverty or approximately 235,000 people who are homeless in a year. For a country as wealthy as Canada, those are very high rates.

I travel the world. Those are high rates in light of our wealth and in light of our fairly small population.

● (0930)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now, I will pass it over to Monsieur Robillard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for Ms. Harriett McLachlan.

Ms. McLachlan, your organization strives to raise public awareness of poverty through conferences and workshops. Can you tell us which parts of those workshops are most effective? What should the main takeaways be for participants?

[*English*]

Ms. Harriett McLachlan: Thank you for your question.

Our workshops offer human rights education around economic, social, and cultural rights. Actually, in Canada, I don't think we understand our human rights, and I believe that they should be integrated into our curriculums in schools across the nation, from elementary school to high school and post-secondary school.

I think that what people walk away with is a much clearer understanding of what human rights are. They are demystified. They are agreements that Canada signed in 1976, and people know the components of involved with them, the practicalities of housing, food security, and those basic things. They're not pie-in-the-sky, in-the-clouds human rights; they're very concrete. We really don't understand poverty in Canada, and these workshops help people to comprehend exactly what it means.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Part of your mandate is to redirect people to the appropriate government programs so they can access the services to which they are entitled.

Among those programs, which are in the greatest demand to reduce poverty and why is that the case?

[*English*]

Ms. Leilani Farha: Unfortunately, there aren't a lot of programs to direct people to in the country at the moment, beyond income assistance or welfare programs, and there are some scant housing programs, etc., so what can I say?

One of the things we are very concerned about at Canada Without Poverty, which is quite difficult to deal with and has been a persistent problem, is the low level that social assistance is set at across the country. I mean, they are unlivable amounts. They're sometimes 50% below the poverty line. It's asking people to live in such severe conditions and circumstances.

It's very difficult to live a life of dignity when you're living in such poverty, really, and it's a little shameful for a country like Canada to allow it to continue. I'm not just talking about indigenous peoples, which is of course a blight on Canada's record, and now a recognized blight, I think. It's about newcomers, people with disabilities, single mothers, and immigrants. For us, that is a big issue that we grapple with, and it's difficult because we're dealing with provinces and territories across the country.

It's not really a federal landscape.

I'll leave it there.

● (0935)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you.

Ms. McLachlan, the ultimate objective is of course to eradicate poverty in Canada through public policy, among other methods. In your opinion, which ones are most effective and why?

[*English*]

Ms. Harriett McLachlan: Thank you again for your question.

I think the kinds of solutions that are effective are those that are comprehensive. When we have a piecemeal or targeted policy here and there, someone is left out; there's some impact on another part of a person's life. For example, if in my poverty there is help for housing, it's quite possible that another part of my whole life would be affected, and likewise for the nation. There are some people who are left out. Most reduction strategies focus on families with children, but not on those who are single with no children and between the ages of 55 and 65, for example.

It has to be comprehensive. It has to touch everyone, because everyone has human rights and rights to housing, food, shelter, and clean drinking water, and so forth. It has to be comprehensive, and not piecemeal or targeted. We have to look at the whole picture.

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

MP Tassi, go ahead, please

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you, witnesses, for your testimony today.

Ms. Farha, with respect to the comment on the human rights approach, I understand that and appreciate it. I'm interested in the 4.9 million. You made reference to this. You said that you won't have 4.9 million people knocking on the door. As a lawyer, it's something that is of concern to me.

I don't want a verbal response, but if you would be so kind, in your submissions that you make to this committee, could you include your reference to other countries and how that in fact hasn't resulted at the end of the day? Unfortunately, I have only six minutes and I have so much stuff. Your input is very valuable.

I just want a very brief 20-second response, maybe, on the connection between education and poverty. Dr. Lee made reference to that. Can you give me a 20- to 30-second response on how you see the link between education and poverty? Do you see it in the same way?

Ms. Leilani Farha: I think that in some cases there's going to be a link and in some cases—Harriett McLachlan is one—there won't be a link. I think poverty is incredibly complex, and the paths into poverty and the persistence of poverty in someone's life can be very complex.

Ms. Harriett McLachlan: I did everything I could. I have a master's degree and worked in my field, and I still lived in poverty. That's an example of how it needs to be comprehensive. It's not just a job and it's not just education. It needs to be the whole of it.

● (0940)

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Thank you for that, and congratulations. It's amazing.

My questions now are going to be directed to Ms. Milne.

The two areas I would like to address have to do with child care and the flow of money—looking at the flow of money through a gendered lens. I'm going to leave it to you as to how best to answer that within the four minutes you have.

I know you've written extensively about the lack of affordable child care and how this is an insurmountable barrier for women. By looking at what's happening in the provinces with low-cost child care and different programs—I know there's a provincial program in B.C. —what can we learn? What works, and what doesn't work?

Second, with respect to the flow of funds, we know that poverty disproportionately impacts Canadian women. Can you comment on the gendered nature of the fund and resource allocation, and how this leads to increased poverty among women?

Ms. Kendra Milne: Absolutely. Those are great questions, but big questions for four minutes.

With respect to the child care issue, I can speak from my focus in B.C. I think it's a good case study for how things are working. In large part here, child care has been left to the private market, and it is largely unaffordable for families, even middle-income families. The median cost of child care right now is between $1,200 to $1,300 a month. It's the second-biggest cost for families after housing. When I interview women about their individual experiences, I can see how that cost trickles down into their financial insecurity in so many ways. We know that a targeted subsidy system in B.C. is not addressing those needs.

We have a system in B.C. that is intended to help people afford child care. It's failing because the subsidies are not high enough to meet the escalating costs of child care, so there are huge gaps, even for people living in deep poverty. For example, someone on income assistance who's a single parent of one child and has an income of $900 a month would maybe be left with $300 or $400 in child care costs after a full child care subsidy. It's simply unattainable for people. Also, the caps are too low. The income threshold at which you're no longer able to get a subsidy simply isn't working. Again, I think this is largely a product of it being a piecemeal approach.

I will say there is one very new program in B.C. It is a piecemeal program, but its beginnings show some real promise. It's called the single parent employment initiative. It's for families on income assistance, and it's targeted at single-parent families. The income assistance system pays the full cost of child care as well as tuition costs for 12-month education programs. If the single parent is able to get employment after those 12 months, the system continues to pay the full cost of child care, with no cap, for 12 months after that. We see a real recognition of the fact that the cost of child care is a huge obstacle to particularly single-parent families getting out of poverty. Addressing those full costs of care is key to helping those families get some financial relief to allow them to retrain and work on their independence.

With respect to the flow of funds, in general, flowing funding without a gendered lens often leads to targeted funding for things like homeless shelters, which are obviously very necessary. However, this type of flowing funding doesn't meet the particular needs of women, and it doesn't address the feminization of poverty. I know this is a long-term goal and there have been comments about this being a really progressive realization, but I think part of what needs to happen is that we move away from these practical, real “reaching for immediate implementation” steps we can take. Instead, we need to look at our long-term human rights obligations and figure out a long-term plan to start working towards them. One of those things is to review federal transfers and to potentially attach conditions to make sure that, by using a human rights lens and a gendered lens, the needs of women in poverty are being met.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Can you comment on how best to do that? When you look at how you actually do that, when you look at the flow of money through a gendered lens, how do you set that up so you can study it and analyze it effectively?

Ms. Kendra Milne: I think the first step, when we're looking at new policies and coming up with a road map for a strategy, is that it has to take into account the different causes of poverty. The causes are complex. It may be education. It's caregiving for many women. It may be disability-related. There may be systemic discrimination against immigrant and racialized people. I don't mean to suggest that it's easy, but I think we need to back up a step and look at what's causing people to be in poverty in the first place.

When we're looking at, for example, changes to EI parental leave, we need to make sure we're looking at changes like those at the federal level through a gendered lens. That consultation is happening absent that discussion despite the fact that 90% of the people who use those leaves are women. We don't look at the long-term effects of, for example, longer leaves and whether they contribute to women staying out of the labour force longer and therefore their long-term economic insecurity. We don't look at those things.

With respect to areas within provincial jurisdiction, I think a key is to use that big national comprehensive human rights lens and gendered lens and then to potentially look at conditional funding to support provinces to comply with human rights obligations and to design programs in a way that meaningfully meets the needs of people in poverty.

● (0945)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go over to Mr. Warawa.

You have six minutes, sir.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I have a question for you, Mr. Lee. I've just been going over the website for Canada Without Poverty—I'm reading a paper and listening at the same time—and it says, “Understanding how systemic causes come together to create barriers demonstrates that poverty cannot just be solved through 'jobs' alone.” Then there's an additional paper written, *Dignity for All: A National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada*.

You said that we need to retrain and retrain and retrain. I was just talking to my colleague here, and in my own life, there were times when I myself could have been considered living in poverty. Things were extremely tough in the eighties. People were losing their homes. We lived on wieners and beans and Kraft Dinner as a family. It was very difficult. I had employees, and they got paid and I didn't, because that was my responsibility as an employer.

Those were tough years—I think the interest rates went extremely high, over 20%—but we made it through hard work. As the economy changed, I re-educated and retrained. My credentials were no longer marketable, and I adapted to a change in culture.

We heard from Ms. McLachlan that she has a master's degree, and yet she has identified herself as living in poverty. Could you touch on the importance of retraining and making yourself marketable in a changing culture?

Dr. Ian Lee: First, let me just deal with that. I'm dealing with the macro statistics; I'm not dealing with anecdotal data. There are always exceptions. I can find any exception to any statistical norm. So the fact that one person, the famous Ph.D. in English literature, is driving a taxi in Toronto.... I've never met the person, but I'm sure the person exists. But that does not invalidate the idea that post-secondary education is absolutely correlated....There's StatsCan data on this for 50 years.

Every additional year of post-secondary education leads to higher incomes. That's the absolute correlation with post-secondary. Remember, post-secondary is not just university. It's colleges, universities, and trades, for those who think it's a bias towards university education, because I don't have that bias.

The data is crystal clear. So is the American data, by the way. I'm only talking about the U.S. because we share the same continent; we're English-speaking mostly, with the important exception of Quebec. We're both English common-law countries sharing essentially the same climate, the same geography, the same legal system, and the same economic system. Their data is almost identical to ours.

Every additional year of post-secondary education leads to higher incomes and lower percentages of unemployment. That is not a one-year trend. That has been since the end of the Second World War. That's about 75 years. That's the “long run”, to use Keynes' famous phrase.

There's no question about the importance of education. I didn't say it was the only solution or the be-all and the end-all, but it is certainly very important.

Second, to come to your question, I have believed what I told you all of my adult life, obviously. But I think it's becoming more acute today than it was in the 1970s and 1980s because of the enormous transformation that is occurring in western economies, which we all know about. I call it the digitization of the economy.

Every year, I tell my students that I'm preaching to the converted. I teach only fourth year, and they're about to graduate. They're doing the fourth year of their B.Comms. I'm telling them to go and tell their brothers and their sisters and their parents and their cousins that if any of them are pooh-poohing education—because it is fashionable in some quarters to pooh-pooh post-secondary—that my confident statement is that today, if you have a grade 10 or a grade 12 or a grade 8 education, you are going to be poor for the rest of your life.

Of course, there are always exceptions and some person can raise a hand and say, I'm a high school dropout, and look, I became a self-employed multi-millionaire entrepreneur. But they are the exceptions; they are the statistical outliers. We have to look at the data set, which is the aggregate. As I've said, in this new economy that we're moving into, we have to be more educated, not less educated. We have to be focused.

If we want to have a serious conversation about poverty reduction, we have to realize that education has to be right at the centre. I'm using education more broadly than just going to university. I'm talking about college. I think the colleges are doing a phenomenal job, by the way. I think they're doing a better job probably than we are in the universities, I'm ashamed to say. And of course, there are the trades.

We have to be talking about that and we have to reduce the barriers. It's not just the barriers that Mr. Poilievre mentioned. I fully acknowledge them. They've been known for literally 50 to 60 years. They've been discussed in past federal budgets. I'm talking about the barriers that prevent a person who is on welfare, on social assistance, or on unemployment insurance from going back to school.

I would even say that we should be saying to those people, if you're on social assistance or unemployment insurance, we'll make a condition that you go back to school to obtain the social assistance or the unemployment insurance. We should be turning it upside down when we know that this new economy needs people much more skilled than did the economy in 1968 or 1981, when you could get by as a male with a grade 8 education and you'd have quite a nice life. Those days are so gone it's not funny.

We have to put education right at the centre of any discussion about poverty. Everything else is just noise, because it's not going to happen unless we retrain. We are a very sophisticated economy, but there's no room for people who are not well skilled or trained in this new economy. They're going to be permanently unemployed or go through a series of employment, unemployment, and employment at the margins of society.

● (0950)

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir.

We'll go over to Mr. Ruimy, please.

Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.): Thank you very much, everybody, for some really great, interesting presentations.

My theme since we started this has been measurability. We've heard about LICO and the LIM. We also heard the suggestion that 85% of Canadians are ready for retirement.

I'm curious to know, Ms. Farha and Ms. Milne, whether you think there are better ways of measuring poverty, because that's really what it comes down to. It could be that there are five million people who are poor in this country by one set of standards. It could mean a lot higher number. It could mean a lot lower number. How do you think we should be measuring poverty?

Ms. Farha, you go first, and then we'll go to Ms. Milne.

Ms. Leilani Farha: Thank you.

Actually, I don't share your concern, to be perfectly honest. I think the LIM is a decent measure and it's an international measure, so I think it's useful.

I've never been an advocate for a poverty line necessarily. I think we kind of know how we're doing in the country, to be honest, and when the numbers are as high as they are, we know that we have a problem. So I'm a little less concerned.

I think people need to be out there measuring. I'm not discounting that, but that's just not where I would put my emphasis. We have the LIM. I think it's okay and it serves our purposes.

I don't know if Ms. Milne has a different opinion, though. It would be interesting.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Okay.

Ms. Milne.

Ms. Kendra Milne: In anti-poverty work in B.C., most organizations have switched to using the Market Basket Measure purely because it addresses regional differences in cost of living. That said, I think what I often see happening, having worked in this area for a while, is that we tend to get really bogged down in debating which measure is the right one.

Again, I also agree; I don't suggest that we shouldn't be measuring, but I think doing so can often detract from solutions. It creates this debate that gets away from really working on addressing the causes and coming up with a solution.

● (0955)

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Thank you, Ms. Milne. That leads me to my next question.

Coming from B.C., I do know about the single-parent assistance program. I think it's a great program. Is there any feedback that we've been able to get as to how it's working?

Part of the reason I keep coming up with the measurement is because, in order to solve problems, you have to know where you are and then where you're going.

That is a great program, but can you expand on it a bit, please?

Ms. Kendra Milne: It has only been in existence or in operation for a little over a year now, so I think we're just looking at potentially, probably soon, hearing reports from the social development ministry here about its working. We haven't heard anything yet.

It's interesting that it comes with a sort of basket of reforms to income assistance that are very focused on single-parent families and childhood poverty. They've been very piecemeal in nature and in the way they've unravelled, but there has been a shift from forcing folks on income assistance to exhaust every other measure and to be destitute before they can access those benefits to a lens that is more about allowing families to access supports and other forms of income while still maintaining their welfare benefits as a more effective way to move them out of poverty. So while the single-parent employment initiative program is a very targeted and piecemeal program, the recognition of the underlying causes of those families' poverty is the beginning of the kind of long-term, human-rights-based recognition we're talking about. Programs such as that might be some of the very implementable steps across the country to work towards those long-term, human-rights-based goals.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Thank you.

Ms. Farha and then Ms. Milne, if we could make adjustments to delivery of social assistance programs in Canada, what do you think would be the most influential change?

Ms. Leilani Farha: I think the Canada social transfer should have conditions attached to it. I know conditionality is pooh-poohed and people say it's impossible. I don't agree that it's impossible, and I'm seeing that move in the United States and in other countries as well, where you just simply say, in order to get this money, you need to meet our international human rights standards, which means social assistance rates have to be set at a realistic level.

I think that would be a massive change, actually.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Thank you.

Ms. Milne.

Ms. Kendra Milne: I would really agree with that. I think the only other piece I would add to it is that it has to address the feminization of poverty throughout women's lives. It has to come hand in hand with affordable and accessible child care, because we just know that is such a massive obstacle for women.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Okay.

I have only about 30 seconds. Can we speak to any of this towards disabled or indigenous folks?

We haven't really spoken about disabled folks. They are part of that population, so how can we speak to their needs with government programs?

Ms. Farha.

Ms. Leilani Farha: I think what Ms. Milne is saying about women and the need for a gender lens absolutely applies to all disadvantaged groups, and we can name them and give you the rates of poverty for each group.

People with disabilities are amongst the poorest in the country. Absolutely we need to be examining this from the point of view of persons with disabilities, and presumably you'll be hearing from or you have already heard from one of the organizations representing their interests.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

It's Mr. Zimmer for five minutes, please.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to our witnesses for coming.

I'm going to preface the conversation a bit. I've heard a lot of solutions from the Canada Without Poverty folks, and talking about not necessarily costing more money. I think what needs to be understood is that somebody has to pay the bill at the end of the day for any kind of programs that we have, and often it's the same people you are referring to, who are living in poverty. They are the taxpayers who are hit the most by programs that are changed. An earlier witness suggested doubling CPP. That one initiative alone would cost every person who is paying into it about $6,000 per year. We are talking about $6,000 per individual. If you talk about a household, it's about $13,000 extra per year. This is before-tax money.

I think Ms. McLachlan started by saying that we are a very wealthy nation. We are actually a nation that's $636 billion in debt, which is about $80 million per day and about $17,000 per Canadian. Again, the same Canadians in poverty you are talking about have to pay the bill.

Mr. Lee, you said something that concerns me—that we are in a time of low economic growth. Indeed, in the past, in the eighties—maybe in the late eighties.... I am from a resource sector area, northern B.C. We do oil and gas and forestry. I know we have to have solutions that don't necessarily cost more, but let's talk about efficiency.

From your perspective, Mr. Lee, how would you address a strategy for poverty reduction? Most of these programs that are talked about today are simply going to cost taxpayers a lot of money, and the taxpayer has to pay the bill.

● (1000)

Dr. Ian Lee: I'll just preface my answer to that by saying that I think there is a disconnect between what the people appearing before your committee are saying writ large and what the finance minister, Minister Morneau, is going to tell you this afternoon. It's not me—he is going to tell you that the revenues are down, not up. People coming before this committee are saying, "Spend a lot more", while the government revenues are going down. That's what I mean by a disconnect or mismatch between the advice you are getting and the economic reality that Minister Morneau faces. That's not going to change.

I have one more quick point, just to get this on the record. There is a very substantial number—I don't want to say dozens—of highly reliable studies from very authoritative sources—I'm talking the IMF, the OECD, the Federal Reserve bank, the Bank of Canada, Finance Canada—showing that aging.... The only debate is, how much does aging reduce the economic growth? There is no debate that it reduces growth. Some say it's 1%. Some say it's 1.5%, and some say it's 2%. We know that the days of the seventies, eighties, nineties, and even the first decade of the 21st century are behind us. We are not going back to 4% and 5% GDP growth. We are looking at 1% to 2% GDP growth. The only question is—which is what I said in my closing comments—whether there is any way we can grow the pie so as to counter this drag on the economy called aging.

I am not a defeatist. I'm not saying, "Oh, well, the game's over. Let's all give up and go home." I am saying there are things we can do. I don't agree that it's classical tired old Keynesian stimulus—just print and spend money. The advisory committee to Minister Morneau has pointed the way: economic immigration, infrastructure, an infrastructure bank, and so forth. There are things we can do. We can reduce the huge barriers to interprovincial trade in this country, which will raise incomes. Every time we talk about raising incomes, every MP should say, "Ah, that means more revenues to the federal and provincial governments to spend", because that's what we are talking about.

It's not about how we can spend more money for anti-poverty programs, when we are not even confronting the underlying problem, which, in my view, is the lack of employability. Secondly, we are advocating solutions that are going to be very expensive and that, the reality is, Minister Morneau is not going to accept. I don't believe that any finance minister will accept an enormous increase in spending on CPP or on the social transfers. We have to deal with the reality we are confronting.

As I said, I think we can do things to increase the size of the pie, which means more revenues flow in to spend for health care, social policy, and so forth.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Absolutely, Mr. Lee. One thing I can relate to you is that I was a mature student, just like you. I was a carpenter for many years before that. I wanted to attend university. I wanted to see, I guess, a different side of life, other than as a tradesman. I went to university at 29, and here I am. We didn't come by it easily. It was a lot of hard work.

Dr. Ian Lee: It was.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I think a lot of the incentive for me to come here was that hard work. I knew that if I wanted to see my life get a little bit easier, I had to do some more work and go to university. Two degrees and twenty years later, here I am.

I wanted to ask you something quickly, Ms. McLachlan. As a person who's a part of a national organization, you say you're still in poverty. What's your definition of poverty? Please give a very brief answer.

Ms. Harriett McLachlan: A very brief answer is that I'm making choices between paying my hydro and buying food. I don't have enough money at the end of the day. I can't make ends meet. That's basically it, but I'd like to respond to his—

The Chair: We are out of time, sorry, but maybe we'll come back in a later question.

For three minutes, go ahead, MP Sansoucy.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you very much. Before I turn to Ms. Farha, I would like to make two comments.

Ms. Milne, I appreciate the importance of what you have said. You stated very fairly and very clearly that your recommendations must have a gender perspective. Thank you for that.

My second comment is for Mr. Lee. Your remarks lead me to the following question: as parliamentarians, over and above the expenditures we have to decide upon and in view of reduced revenues, what revenues are we missing out on due to our current tax system and the way we operate?

My question is for Ms. Farha. Departmental officials have told the committee that we do not have a definition of poverty in Canada. I think that is the starting point. Within your organization or internationally, is there a clear definition of poverty that we could use?

● (1005)

[*English*]

Ms. Leilani Farha: Thanks for the question.

I just want to say one thing about spending and poverty. If I said to you that 235,000 people were being tortured in Canada, would we ever say, “Yes, but we don't have enough money to deal with that”? No. We would say that's a human rights issue, and we need to solve it, and that's what we're saying here. When I say 235,000 people in a country that the World Bank says has the 10th largest GDP, I'm saying we have a human rights crisis on our hands that has to be solved. You can't just say we don't have enough resources. Even in times of conflict, in natural disasters, in places where there is no money—and I mean no money—we expect human rights to be respected, protected, and fulfilled. Period.

On the issue of not having a definition, the measures that we have are good definitions. Can a person make ends meet? We don't have to be all technical and complicated about this. It's pretty straightforward. The Market Basket Measure that Ms. Milne referred to is a good one because of its regional specificity. If you don't have enough money to pay your rent—and we know affordability is a huge issue across the country—or you don't have enough money to buy a basket of groceries—and we're not talking caviar and fancy orange juice; we're talking basics—then you don't have enough money to live. Heating costs in Canada are another major component.

At the international level, there are standards for particular areas of poverty. For housing, food, water and sanitation, there are adequacy standards. You'll find that Canada is failing our lowest income group on all of those measures. If you look at indigenous populations, we're not meeting the adequacy components of housing, food, or water and sanitation.

There are guidelines, but they're not hard definitions, because you have to have a contextual approach.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to briefly suspend to give people an opportunity to stretch their legs. We'll be back in two or three minutes, please.

● (1005)

(Pause)

● (1015)

The Chair: We're back.

We have Monsieur Poilievre for the next six minutes.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Thank you.

I'm very interested in Madam Farha's conversation on the human rights angle of poverty. I would expand on that. We have to talk about rights, but equally important are freedoms.

One of the freedoms most ignored but also most important is economic freedom, the freedom to earn a living and enjoy the fruits of one's labour, to escape want, and to live in dignity.

One of the things I'd like to hear more of from our witnesses is how the government's violation of economic freedoms leads to poverty in the first place.

Witnesses have talked about how housing is too expensive. I was in Belleville about a year ago. I spoke to an older Italian man who was taking an old Victorian mansion and turning it into five to seven affordable housing units, with no help from the government. The number one cost to him was not materials or labour. It was paperwork. It was the delays that the government imposed upon him.

This is a perfect example of the transfer of wealth. You're taking a mansion that would be a house for a millionaire and turning it into an apartment building that will be homes for people who pay $500 or $600 a month. And far from being helpful, the government is standing in the way. As I understand it, he's still not done—I spoke to him over a year ago.

Ms. McLachlan spoke about her challenge to pay hydro bills. In my province, Ontario, hydro bills have more than doubled, because the government has made a decision to subsidize investment bankers and well-connected insiders through inflated electricity payments. There are a lot of people making a lot of money, people who don't need it. There are a lot of people on fixed incomes who are scraping by and can't afford to pay their hydro bills. Or we have people who, we're told, need to be on social assistance because they can't find a job, and yet we're raising taxes on people trying to hire.

I wonder if people can talk about the ways in which government is causing poverty in the first place rather than just talking about how government can be a solution to that poverty. We don't need a doctor to administer poison only so that he can then administer an antidote. We'd rather he didn't administer the poison in the first place.

Do you have any comments on how government is robbing us of our economic freedoms and then proposing itself as a solution to the resulting suffering?

Ms. Leilani Farha: Thanks.

I very much appreciate those comments and the question.

I need one point of clarification. There is no human right to economic freedom.

If you look at what Canada has signed and ratified, it is the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and then a whole bunch of other ones on specific populations—people with disabilities, women, etc. Those treaties say that everyone has the right to an adequate standard of living, which includes adequate housing, food, and clothing. Water and sanitation are now also included in that.

So there isn't actually a right to economic freedom, but I'm going to take your comments—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Actually, there is. There is actually a right to economic freedom, and it's 800 years old. It's based on the Magna Carta, which is the oldest constitutional document in our tradition, and is actually cited in jurisprudence all over the Anglosphere.

Ms. Leilani Farha: Fine. It's not considered a human—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: It is a right. It might not be something the UN is interested in—

Ms. Leilani Farha: It's not considered to be a human right. That's right.

● (1020)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: —and certain commissions that you're a part of might not be interested in some of those old-fashioned ideas like freedom. That being said, they do exist, and they are real.

Ms. Leilani Farha: Casting aspersions aside, let's agree to your formulation. I really liked your question, because it goes straight to what would happen if a human rights framework was employed. Whether it's your framework or my framework, it doesn't matter, because you and I end up in the same place, which is pretty interesting and surprising. It's probably going to cause you nightmares tonight.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Yesterday was Halloween.

Ms. Leilani Farha: It goes on and on.

I find it interesting because if we take a human rights approach and look at what you're saying, I've heard before about people wanting to engage in the affordable housing business, if you want to call it that, and not really being able to, and that there aren't government programs. I do think it's an area in which there's a lack of facility. The government doesn't make it easier for someone like your Italian friend to do. I do think we need to look at that.

A human rights framework gets us there because it asks, "Are we doing what we need to be doing to ensure that those with the least amount of money can afford housing?" We know home ownership is not going to be a viable option for every person in Canada or every household in Canada. It's just not. People don't have the ability to make the original down payment, etc. Rental accommodation is something that might work for a huge percentage of our population, but no one is building rental accommodation. Why? It's very cumbersome. There are no incentives at the moment to build rental accommodation, because it's cumbersome and problematic.

A human rights approach gets us to ask the very questions that you want asked. What's causing poverty in Canada? What are the major triggers? The hydro bill issue is another one. This goes right to the adequacy of housing. Under international human rights law, you have to be able to have basic services and afford basic services, like hydro. The human rights question asks, "What are we going to do about the fact that a lot of poor people cannot afford to pay their hydro bills?" From there come the solutions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now go over to MP Sangha, please.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a question for Ms. McLachlan.

As part of the particular groups that you have talked about for human rights regarding immigrants, regarding the people with lone parent families, unattached persons, and senior women, all possibly with low income and possibly with disabilities, they have low income rates that are twice that of others.

In your opinion, how might federal poverty reduction be tailored to make reductions? You talked about a comprehensive way. Give us some innovative ways to suggest to the committee how to reduce poverty.

Ms. Harriett McLachlan: First, I think we need to understand some of the situations. You need to look through a disability lens. You need to look through a gender lens to understand, just as Kendra Milne was saying.

There are a number of ways you can do this. They are detailed in the national anti-poverty plan that the Dignity for All campaign produced. We spent five years in a consultative process with 600 people across the country over six main themes. This comprehensive plan is detailed and on the website. It details a lot of the responses that you're interested in, that would take up way too much time here. I would direct you to the Dignity for All campaign's anti-poverty plan.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Thank you.

Could I request that you provide your submission in writing to the committee, so that your suggestions for the committee to follow would be there?

● (1025)

Ms. Harriett McLachlan: Yes.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Thank you very much.

My next question is to Professor Lee.

Professor, you talked about your personal experience leaving education and then restarting it after the fifth class. You are known as a professor, and you are teaching students. I hope you might be a role model for the students when you tell them your stories. That's a great thing you have done in your life.

You have suggested encouraging people to go back to work or to improve their education. What other measures would you suggest to the committee that we should take not to force but to encourage people to go back to work or to go for higher education?

Dr. Ian Lee: That's an excellent question, because I think there are different angles to it or different facets to it.

I fully recognize that education is a provincial responsibility. I know that, especially in the university, which gets its money from the province, not from the federal government, or at least not directly from the federal government. We get it through the province setting tuition fees, and of course through the transfers to us.

I'm really following my colleague, Professor Ross Finnie of the University of Ottawa, on this. I want to distinguish between the so-called hardcore unemployed, which include some people in the aboriginal community, because that's an untapped resource. We're not talking about 16- or 17-year-olds. These can be people who are 25 or 30 and they are not really strongly attached to the workforce. They haven't been able to obtain any long-term career or a permanent career. That's one group that needs special attention.

That can be done through what I've been calling HRSDC, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, but you have a new name for it and I can't remember what it is. Programs can be developed through that and Employment Canada to target the hardcore unemployed. I'm guessing that will mean working with the provinces, too, to include people on social assistance.

If I can use business language, the ROI, the return on investment, in targeting the hardcore unemployed is going to be very high. If you hired some people to crunch the numbers, I think you'd find a very strong correlation between poverty and the hardcore unemployed. If you can crack that nut by training them.... I don't think they're choosing to be poor. I don't think they're choosing to be in that position.

I've seen the data, by the way, and I will provide it to the committee after. This is from the U.S. Census Bureau and StatsCan. It actually shows income and education as being incredibly correlated. It's not a one-for-one relation, but it's very high; that is to say, the fewer years of education you have, the higher the probability you will be in poverty. You can make that kind of probabilistic statement.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Professor, you suggested that for people with low education who enter employment, there is only a low chance for them to have a better standard of living because of lack of education. That's your stance on it.

Dr. Ian Lee: Let me be really blunt so I'm not talking in generalities. If you don't have post-secondary education today, as a young person, you're going to have a miserable life for the rest of your life.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: I do agree with you, but—

The Chair: Thank you. Unfortunately, that's time.

We do have to move to MP Sansoucy. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Farha, I can tell you that I too agree with Mr. Poilievre at times. As to the committee's work, you can continue to hope and have confidence.

You mentioned international treaties. I will not make a list since you mentioned them and there are a great many of them, but I would like you to talk about them from a different perspective. I would like to know what commitments we, the Government of Canada, have made under these international treaties.

How should these commitments inform our committee's work as to the recommendations we have to make?

[*English*]

Ms. Leilani Farha: Thanks.

There are several committees within the UN human rights system and they are responsible for reviewing Canada's compliance with its international human rights obligations. That's their job. They're made up of independent experts. They don't represent any states, etc., so they're independent experts in the areas of human rights.

There have been many reviews of Canada recently by many committees and there is a consensus in certain areas, and poverty is one of them. Whether it's the committee dealing with women, or the committee dealing with economic, social and cultural rights, or the committee dealing with children, or the committee dealing with racial discrimination, it's been consistent within the UN human rights system that Canada is failing to meet its international human rights obligations.

The committees are very practical, so they come up at the end of their review—and it's on paper as well as oral—and they issue a series of recommendations. Those recommendations could be read by this committee and interpreted for its own purposes and incorporated into the committee's work.

The recommendations are very concrete. They say things like "Social assistance rates across the country are too low. People can't live on those rates and they have to be raised."

As I said, human rights is a way of doing work, so they're very practical, and I think this committee would benefit from looking at all of those recommendations. CWP can certainly provide them to the committee.

● (1030)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Last June, I had the opportunity to accompany the Minister of Labour to the annual conference of the International Labour Organization, in Geneva. I learned that, in the work of our committees, we ask questions to our witnesses and internationally. I discovered that, as a country, we pay to have access to UN resources, that there is a treasure trove of information there, and that we should use those resources more extensively.

Thank you for pointing out that, in the course of its work, our committee should examine the very specific recommendations made by the various committees so that our future recommendations correspond to Canada's commitments under these international treaties.

Thank you for bringing that to our attention. I guess you can also tell us how we could access that information more quickly.

[*English*]

Ms. Leilani Farha: I don't know if there was a question in there.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: I learned that we can get a great deal of information through the United Nations.

Can your organization help us access information that is more decisive for our committee's work?

[*English*]

Ms. Leilani Farha: Yes, we have consolidated all of the recommendations that have been made that might be relevant to the study of the committee around poverty reduction in Canada. We would be happy to forward that information to you forthwith.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you.

Do I have any time left?

[*English*]

The Chair: You have about a minute and a half.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Okay.

Mr. Lee, you said earlier that we need targeted measures.

When Statistics Canada officials appeared before us, they spoke more specifically about poverty among seniors. In your workshops, you meet people living in poverty.

In your opinion, if we automatically paid the guaranteed income supplement to those who are entitled to it, would that constitute a targeted measure?

[*English*]

Dr. Ian Lee: I will, because I've written and spoken about this in papers. In fact, we talked about it in the paper I referenced. I'm, again, basing my comments on a paper done by Professor Jack Mintz that was published in January 2015 at the University of Calgary. He drilled down into the 7.5% of elders. There are two issues. The first issue is those below the poverty line who are already elders; they're over 65. The other issue is those who are not yet 65, but who are approaching 65 and who are not, or allegedly not, pension-ready. I'm now referring only to those who are over 65 and below the poverty line: the 7.5%.

Professor Mintz drilled down into the data and asked a very good research question: who are they? They are overwhelmingly—this is my own phrase—elder elder females. These are not 65-year-old females. These are 85-year-old females, 90-year-old females, like my late mother who raised children and did not work outside the home in the 1950s and 1960s. They don't have CPP.

● (1035)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: My question is very specific. I would like to know if the guaranteed income supplement should be paid automatically to those individuals.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's actually time.

Dr. Ian Lee: Could I have just one second?

The Chair: You have about 10 seconds.

Dr. Ian Lee: The solution is very clear. What Jack Mintz said is the combination of, one, giving survivor benefits of 100% to any spouse who doesn't have a CPP in their own right, instead of having it reduced when the spouse dies and, two, increasing the GIS. He said that for about $5 billion a year in a $2-trillion economy, we can eliminate elder poverty in this country. There's the answer.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to MP Long, please.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I have questions for Ms. Farha and Ms. McLachlan on food security.

I just want to get your thoughts and feedback with respect to food security. So often we see food that's taken away to landfills or composting. I just want to get your thoughts on what you feel, from a government perspective, we can do to make sure that food that gets wasted gets put into our nutrition system.

Ms. Harriett McLachlan: From what I've read recently, there are some trends starting, retailers giving to Food Banks Canada. It might be interesting to look at how to encourage that and an education process about what we do with our food, and how much we buy or don't buy and how much we waste. There are good, hands-on education pieces that people get, and they say, “What? I'm just throwing away $1,000 each time on food, because I'm not being conscious enough?” It might be interesting to support.

Ms. Leilani Farha: I think there are some concerns around that, which I can't articulate, but I've heard buzz in the background, shall we say.

In the Dignity for All national anti-poverty plan for Canada, we have a whole section on what we think should happen with respect to food security, which also looks up north because food security is a huge issue there. It doesn't include the issue of dealing with food waste, but there are a lot of other concrete recommendations, so I would point you to that if you're interested.

Mr. Wayne Long: Ms. Milne, do you have any comments on that?

Ms. Kendra Milne: The food bank solution is one example, and there was the Belleville man who was trying to do the social housing. Certainly there are steps that can be taken to improve or support charitable responses to poverty, but I think the bigger question is to really think through the importance of the government needing to take a more active role and it not just being left to those private charitable responses. We certainly see in B.C. that things such as food banks provide a crucial service particularly for folks trying to survive on income assistance in urban centres, but as soon as you get to rural areas, people are not as able to access those supports.

With regard to leaving things to the whims of donors, while those are welcome and certainly there may be ways to facilitate things happening, they can't be the only response. We have to look past them to the government's role in ensuring that everyone has access to a response.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you.

Ms. Farha, I want to drill down a little further on your comment to my last question about alignment of government. You basically commented, in response to some questions here, that maybe the federal government should attach, I don't want to say strings as much as conditions, to social transfers. Certainly I believe that is one of the things we can do federally. You can look at what's going on with the health care discussions and what have you, but again, it's not just necessarily about throwing more money at it; it's about spending that money correctly and aligning ourselves.

Can you give us more on how you see us being able to align ourselves more with provincial governments?

Ms. Leilani Farha: I do think there's a lot to be mined there and I don't think we've fully explored the ways in which federal and provincial relations could work around conditionality.

I have seen something emerge from the United States, to which people may say, “Whoa, no way; this wouldn't work in Canada”, but I'll put it out there. I think it's always good to hash through ideas and try to figure out the best way forward.

In the United States, states get money for housing, and the federal government has a point system regarding how much money each state will get for how much housing. It's housing for a variety of income brackets. A state gets more points if it has eliminated the criminalization of homelessness. It actually gets more points and therefore more dollars if it takes this bold step of saying it's not going to criminalize homeless people anymore and throw them into jail.

I'm not saying that's an issue here in how we would deal with it, but there might be an interesting way of saying, okay, for provinces and territories that actually decide to raise their minimum wage to a living wage and their social assistance rates to realistic levels, there might be some incentive to do so, a monetary incentive. We might find that unpalatable—I don't know—but I think it's worth exploring those sorts of issues.

You see, we have a problem with federalism, at least from my perspective, the human rights perspective, in that provinces, territories, and municipalities have human rights obligations too, but they can't meet those obligations if they don't have adequate resources. There should be some sort of symbiotic relationship between the feds and the provinces, territories, and municipalities whereby they're all saying that in order to meet their human rights obligations, they need *x* amount of resources; they need the capacity. There has to be a shared conversation around that, and I think the leadership has to come from the federal government.

● (1040)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will go over to MP Tassi for a couple of brief questions.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Thank you.

Before I ask a question, I want to make one clarification and one comment. The first is that the reason we are here is not to come up with ways to throw money at this problem. The reason we are taking this study very seriously, and taking the time we are taking, is to come up with effective ways and innovative ways. That's why all of you witnesses are here today. I just want to make that point.

Second, I feel compelled morally to make a comment with respect to something you said, Dr. Lee. I worked with youth for 20 years in a high school. I just think it's important that we recognize that not all youth are bound to go to university or college. I worked with youth for whom that avenue was not available, either because their passion wasn't there or because they were not capable. We as a committee have to address those youth as well, so that when they go out to the world they can be very successful. I just felt compelled to make that comment.

My question is directed to you, Ms. Farha, Ms. McLachlan, and Ms. Milne, with respect to the evidence we have regarding underlying causes of poverty. We look at groups like women, indigenous groups, those who are disabled. Do you think we have enough evidence? Is the evidence there? Or do we need to do more research?

As well, you are all big proponents of this human rights approach. Very briefly, can you tell us what makes this approach the best approach? Why is this the way to go? Why are you such strong advocates of this approach?

The Chair: Perhaps we could get a brief answer on those. We're almost out of time.

Ms. Leilani Farha: I'll be as succinct as I can.

I'll start with the resource issue, because it's so important. No one has named an amount of money that would be saved if we actually started addressing poverty. I'll give one figure: it costs about $55,000 to have a homeless person on the streets and it costs about $37,000 to have that homeless person housed. That's one small example, but that's a really important point here. We would actually be saving money.

Why do we advocate a human rights approach? We've been talking about causes, the causes of poverty, and 4.9 million people. That number suggests it's a systemic problem. We don't have 4.9 million lazy people or 4.9 million people who ditch school and just can't figure out their way back to school. It's a multipronged, systemic problem.

The human rights approach deals with systemic problems. When you look at what is happening across the country, these are all human rights problems. It's an issue of inequality. It's often an issue of discrimination. It's an issue of the lack of adequate housing. These are all human rights issues. They're codified in international human rights law.

I think it's appropriate to use human rights responses to human rights problems. As I said, we wouldn't abandon the charter in the face of a freedom of expression issue. We would say, well, the charter applies. Why? Because it's a rights issue. I'm saying let's bring those rights to whatever policy, programs, etc., and hopefully legislation, that we have.

● (1045)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm seeing the clock at 10:45. We do have to wrap up. We have another meeting in here at 11 o'clock, so we can't dawdle too much.

I want to take the opportunity to thank all of our witnesses, including the ones who came to us via Vancouver.

As always, thank you to the committee.

Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Just before we adjourn, we had a break. We do have vice-chairs. Can I suggest that if the chairman needs a break, the chair be filled by a vice-chair so that we don't have to break?

We missed out on an opportunity for a question on this important issue because of that break.

The Chair: All right. We can discuss it after. Actually, MP Tassi was cut quite short. I'm not sure, even without the four- or five-minute break, that we would have gotten to your question, but I do take the point. We can chat about that maybe on Thursday. We did in fact agree, when we talked about this new structure, that we would have that break. It was when we talked about going to two solid hours.

We can chat about that on Thursday if we want to maybe change that.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, everybody.

Thanks to the translators and my colleagues on either side. We'll see everybody Thursday.

The meeting is adjourned.