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Chair: Ms. Marilyn Gladu



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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)): Welcome to the 14th meeting of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021.

For members on Zoom, you'll be using the "raise hand" function and the order of speaking will be displayed on the screen in the participants list. Remember to mute your mike when you're not speaking.

Today, the committee—

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Madam Chair, I think the staff cannot hear. Can we check the sound, please?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Stephanie Bond): I do see the staff in the list of attendees. It appears to be okay. Please let us know if they cannot hear. We are looking into it on our side.

Please proceed.

The Chair: Today we have our panel on pay equity. I'm very happy to have, from the Human Rights Commission, Karen Jensen and also Jeff Willbond, the director general of proactive compliance.

I don't know how long you have for opening remarks. I'm willing to give each of you five minutes, which is our standard, but if you want to speak together for five, that's fine as well.

We'll begin right away with you, Ms. Jensen. You have five minutes.

Ms. Karen Jensen (Commissioner, Pay Equity, Canadian Human Rights Commission): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning to you, Madam Chair, the vice-chairs and the honourable committee members.

My name is, as you know, Karen Jensen, and I am Canada's first federal pay equity commissioner. With me today is Jeff Willbond, director general of the proactive compliance branch of the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging, with gratitude, the Algonquin Anishinabe nation, from whose traditional and unceded territory I am speaking today.

I'm honoured to be asked to speak with you today about why now is the right time for pay equity in Canada and to fill you in on

the work that the pay equity division of the Canadian Human Rights Commission is doing to prepare for the coming into force of the Pay Equity Act.

Since being called to the bar in 1994, I have been involved in representing employees, unions and employers in lengthy, contentious and extremely costly pay equity litigation. I saw personally the toll that pay equity litigation took on all of those involved, and I believe, therefore, very strongly in the benefits of Canada's move to a proactive pay equity system. That's why I was deeply honoured to be appointed federal pay equity commissioner in October 2019. I truly believe that pay equity is an important building block for Canada as it moves to build back better from the pandemic.

As we know, COVID-19 has exposed our vulnerabilities and our inequalities. Women have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, especially racialized women, indigenous women, migrant women, women with low income, single mothers, LGBTQ+ women and women with disabilities or mental health issues.

Women workers in Canada were hit first by the pandemic and they've been feeling the impact the longest. In November of 2020 RBC Economics reported that the pandemic had rolled back the clock on about three decades' worth of women's progress in the labour market, setting Canada's economy up for a slower recovery than would otherwise be the case. Closing the gender pay gap is essential to our country's economic and social recovery, and it is essential for Canadian workers.

[Translation]

This is a painful time for our businesses. For those concerned about bringing in the Pay Equity Act at this time, it should be noted that there is a growing body of evidence that demonstrates how paying women equally for work of equal value to men's work is good for business. For example, the *Harvard Business Review* recently highlighted research showing that, in regions like North America, the most—

[English]

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): I have a point of order.

I'm hearing the interpretation at the same volume, so I can't really understand. I don't know if anyone else is having this problem.

The Chair: Clerk, can you check on the translation?

Also, if the staff are still having difficulty.... Most of them are reporting that they can hear, but if they do have difficulty, they can call the phone lines and they'll address their issue.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Madam Chair, staff can hear now. Thank you.

The Chair: Very good.

[Translation]

Ms. Karen Jensen: According to a study that was recently published in the *Harvard Business Review*, in regions like North America, the most talented individuals prefer to work in companies that foster diversity.

Pay equity is a tool in promoting diversity in companies. It will assist companies to attract top talent, which will in turn assist them to outperform their peers.

[English]

In preparing for the new legislation coming into force, I have conducted extensive consultations with unions, employers, women's organizations and employer associations to identify any concerns they may have and to find out how we could best address them. In response to the needs identified by stakeholders, the pay equity team is developing educational materials, guidance documents and concrete tools that will assist the workplace parties to implement the act.

We are working closely with stakeholder groups to ensure that these tools work well for employers and employees.

Communication about the new legislation is key to our success. My goal as commissioner is to demystify pay equity and help employers to see that it is a golden opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to gender equality in the workplace.

The economic conditions for women are perilous right now and need to be addressed. Pay equity is one tool among many that will make a concrete difference in the economic reality of many women and help us as a nation to benefit from the full participation of women in the workplace.

• (1110)

[Translation]

I welcome your questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

Jeff, are you going to speak as well?

Mr. Jeff Willbond (Director General, Proactive Compliance, Canadian Human Rights Commission): Thanks, Madam Chair.

I would simply say—because I respectfully wanted to give the floor and the time to Commissioner Jensen—that I, too, am in a brand new role for the Canadian Human Rights Commission. It's the first time we've had a director general responsible for proactive compliance, which brings under a single umbrella two program areas: pay equity and the Accessible Canada Act. I am responsible for

those two pieces of legislation with respect to compliance and enforcement.

That's a new mandate for the Canadian Human Rights Commission, and we are very proud and pleased to deliver on the work that's important for Canadians moving forward.

The Chair: Excellent.

We'll begin our rounds of questioning, for six minutes each, with Ms. Wong.

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much for having the two witnesses with us. Either one of you can answer my questions.

You mentioned that Ms. Jensen's job started in October 2019, but the Pay Equity Act was actually much earlier. What percentage or portion of complaints were filed with your organization in regard to gender-based pay discrimination?

I also have a second question. As a member of Parliament for Richmond Centre, which is very diverse, I have a large population of ethnic constituents. Does the gap change at all when we look at ethnic women specifically?

Ms. Karen Jensen: Thank you very much for that question.

I will address the first question, which is whether or not there have been any complaints filed. As the member rightly pointed out, the legislation is.... I was appointed in October of 2019, which was approximately a year after the proactive pay equity legislation was passed in Parliament in December of 2018. The act is not yet in force, and we are anticipating that the act will come into force later on in 2021.

At this time, all complaints regarding pay equity are filed under the Canadian Human Rights Act—that's section 11 of the Canadian Human Rights Act—and we do know that from 2010 until the present time there have not been a great number of complaints filed. In fact, there are only about 19 complaints that were filed regarding pay equity during that time period. Of those—in fact, I think only 17 complaints have been filed—there are only nine that are proceeding, and those are largely dealing with public service institutions. Once the act comes into force, it will apply to all employers with 10 or more employees, which is about 4,500 employers across Canada, covering about 1.3 million employees.

The member has properly put forward an interesting question with respect to the levels of pay equity discrimination for ethnic women. Indeed, we know that the pay equity gap is different depending on the characteristics of the women and whether women are characterized by intersectional identities.

We know that in general the wage gap is 89¢; that is, women earn 89¢ on the dollar earned by men in Canada globally. However, racialized women working full time earn an average of only 67¢ on the dollar earned by non-racialized men. Indigenous women, on the other hand, earn approximately 65¢ on the dollar for every non-indigenous male dollar. For newcomer women, it's 71¢ on the male dollar. Disabled women—women living with physical or mental disabilities—are earning only approximately 54¢ on the dollar earned by every male who is non-disabled.

Yes, indeed, there is a differential impact of wage discrimination depending upon the identity of the women involved.

• (1115)

Hon. Alice Wong: Thank you very much for that.

For my next question, I'm applying my seniors lens.

All of us know that we live longer. Women live longer and are still very productive and very active even though they are considered to be seniors. Of course, the WHO has a totally different definition of seniors. You can only officially be called a “senior” when you reach the age of 80. I'm not extending it that far.

Does age factor into the pay gap at all?

Ms. Karen Jensen: Thank you for that question.

Indeed, the Pay Equity Act applies to all federally regulated workplaces. To the extent that older women find themselves in federally regulated workplaces and are continuing to work, yes, they most certainly will be eligible for pay equity adjustments, should that be found to be necessary within a given workplace.

We do know that mandatory retirement is no longer permissible, so in fact the average working age has increased. There now are more women working in the workforce later on into life, of course, me included, and who are proud to be doing so. Those women, if they are working within predominantly female job classes in a federally regulated workplace, will be part of the pay equity study. If the value of their work compared to the value of predominantly male work is comparable and they are being paid less than the men who are doing comparable work, yes, they will most certainly be eligible for a pay equity-related increase in their wages.

The Chair: Very good.

Now we'll go to Ms. Sidhu for six minutes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for joining us today, Ms. Jensen. I was a member of the pay equity committee, so I'm really looking forward to the work you will be doing. I was proud to work for this alongside members of the Liberal caucus, despite the nay vote from the opposition for the budget implementation act.

When the Pay Equity Act is fully implemented, it will be the country's first proactive pay monitoring system. Under the old system, it was complaint-based. Women had to have proof that they were subject to discrimination. They had to bring forward that complaint, which risked retaliation from their employers. Soon federally regulated industries will need to self-report on their pay data, which hopefully will lead to a more transparent process.

Can you tell us what you see the effect being of the new system in the long and short term?

Ms. Karen Jensen: Yes, indeed, I'm happy to do that.

I would just like to clarify that in fact the federal legislation is really the third proactive piece of pay equity legislation in the country. Both Quebec and Ontario have had proactive pay equity legislation for some time. This is the first piece of proactive pay equity legislation in the federal jurisdiction.

As the member has rightly pointed out, it has been a long time coming. We are very happy to see that the complaint-based process has been replaced with a proactive process that puts the responsibility on the shoulders of the employers to undertake an analysis to determine whether or not there's a pay gap. It's not dependent any longer on women and unions to come forward and raise complaints and concerns about the pay equity system.

We anticipate that there will be significant benefits to this legislation. Aside from the obvious benefit of increasing the wages of women in federally regulated workplaces where there is found to be inequities, there are numerous other advantages in terms of the impact this can have on women and indeed on all of society. A study that was done in Ontario on their proactive pay equity legislation revealed that a number of psychosocial benefits resulted from proactive pay equity legislation—increased self-esteem among female workers, increased retirement savings available to women when they retired, increased financial security of single mothers and increased retention rates among female employees in workplaces.

I really want to underscore that last point. Pay equity has tremendous benefits for the business community. I'm pleased that in my outreach efforts, I'm seeing businesses recognize this. When an employer undertakes a pay equity analysis and communicates to its employees that it cares very much about gender equality in the workplace, that has enormous benefits for the business itself. There is quite a bit of research, which I alluded to in my opening remarks, that suggests that those businesses that promote gender equality are in fact more productive, more resilient and better at competing in the marketplace. Pay equity has been established to be good for business, good for workers and good for the economy. We know that paying women a fair wage for the work that is done will increase the household buying power. That will also fuel the economic recovery.

The more that women are able to participate equally in the workforce and increase their economic power and independence, the better off we all are. Of course, this will also have an impact on the children in Canada. That's important to note as well.

• (1120)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you for that explanation, Ms. Jensen.

We know that pay inequality is not just a matter of gender. The average working woman in Canada makes 87¢ for every dollar a man makes, but for visible minorities it's 67¢. Women who have children also make less than those who don't. Men with children actually make more than their peers without them.

Can you tell us how these intersectional inequalities, more than just comparing men and women, will be addressed?

Ms. Karen Jensen: Yes, indeed, and thank you for the question.

We believe that the proactive pay equity regime is particularly likely to benefit women with intersecting identities, such as newcomer women, racialized women, indigenous women and women with disabilities. Research indicates that women with intersecting identities face larger wage gaps, as the member has pointed out, due to, for example, part-time employment, precarious work, occupational segregation, social norms, stereotypes and unconscious bias.

As part of our engagement strategy, the commission is engaging with diverse women to better understand how intersectional factors affect their economic outcomes. However, we do know that when women with intersecting identities are part of predominantly female work categories, employers are now required to look at the value of that work and compare it to the value of work done predominantly by men.

The Chair: I'm sorry. That's your time for that question.

[Translation]

Ms. Larouche, you have six minutes.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. Jensen, Pay Equity Commissioner, and Mr. Willbond, Director General of Proactive Compliance, thank you very much for taking the time to visit us this morning to talk about this legislation, which is crucial for advancing feminism in Canada.

The figures in your speaking notes reveal gaps that remain far too significant for women, whether they are racialized, Indigenous, with disabilities, or otherwise.

You mentioned proactivity for employers and the tools and guides that can help them. What could we find in these guides and tools that could truly help employers apply this important legislation?

• (1125)

Ms. Karen Jensen: I am delighted to talk about our tools.

We are actually developing very useful tools that will significantly help small and medium enterprises to develop their pay equity plans.

With one of these tools, which uses Excel, employers will be able to enter their data by job category and let the tool do the calculations needed to determine whether there is a pay gap. If so, it will indicate how much to invest in order to fill that gap. The tool will therefore be very effective and very important for employers who find it difficult to comply with the requirement to prepare a pay equity plan.

In addition, we are drafting guidelines for employers and unions to provide them with an explanation of the techniques and methods set out in the act, which are sometimes difficult to understand. We also have a legislative guide that clearly explains the requirements of the act and provides concrete examples of how to comply with it.

In addition, we are preparing training material for employers. We want all employers across Canada to have the equipment, the tools and the material they need to understand their obligations under the act.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: All right.

Those tools will really help them. As you said yourself, Ms. Jensen, the act dates back to 2018. We're now in 2021, and we look forward to it being properly applied.

In your speaking notes, you also talked about the stereotypes and myths regarding pay equity. What are they? How do they delay the application of the act?

Ms. Karen Jensen: The concept of pay equity is certainly based on the fact that there are myths about the value of the work done by women in the labour market. However, I would not say that the myths and stereotypes have an effect on the implementation progress of the act. Rather, I would say that we are preparing for it to be implemented.

Part of our job is really to educate employers so that they know that systemic discrimination is based on myths and stereotypes that we are not aware of and that are unintentional, but that have crept into our compensation systems over the years.

We also need to teach them that proactively reviewing our compensation systems is actually essential for eliminating the effects of those myths and stereotypes on these systems.

• (1130)

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: You talked about giving employers three years to develop their action plans.

Do you believe that this is realistic? Will three years be enough?

What is this deadline based on? How did you determine that it would be three years? Could it be shorter?

Ms. Karen Jensen: The act provides that each employer has three years to develop a pay equity plan. Parliament made that choice when it drafted the legislation.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Based on what you have observed since you have been working—

The Chair: Your time is up.

[English]

Ms. Mathysen, you have six minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Jensen, just a few months ago we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, and they talked about the need for pay equity. In 1977, equal pay for equal work was enshrined in the Canadian Human Rights Act, but it took until 2018 to actually get pay equity legislation. As Madame Larouche was talking about in terms of the delays, it took three years to see potential regulations come into place, which we actually haven't seen yet. They continue to get pushed back and pushed back.

Do you have an idea or do you have any inside knowledge? I asked the government last week whether they could say when those regulations were coming. They said it could be the fall, or it could be later. Do you happen to know anything more about when the regulations will actually come into place?

Ms. Karen Jensen: The regulations were pre-published in the Canada Gazette, part I, on November 14, 2020, as I'm sure the member knows. As a pay equity division of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, we have been actively involved in examining those regulations and working with ESDC—Employment and Social Development Canada—to ensure the regulations are sound. There was a 60-day period following the prepublication for submissions to be made by interested parties. I believe that was done and there was a significant interest in those regulations.

The process will proceed. I cannot comment on that. I am not privy to that information, nor is that my role as a federal pay equity commissioner, but I can certainly assure the member that we are actively involved in reviewing the regulations and ensuring that they're transparent, clear and understandable for Canadian businesses and Canadian unions to work with in the development of their pay equity plans. Those regulations are necessary to support the act coming into force, and we do know that the government has indicated that it's likely the act will come into force later on this year.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Obviously it can be very frustrating. It's been 50 years, and now we're being told that it's only after those regulations are in place, whenever that may be.

I understand that it has to be done well and it's not something you take lightly, but this work could have potentially been done more effectively so that women weren't waiting so long. For the employers to have three years to draft plans, a potential additional three to five years to go forward with the implementation of those plans, we're looking at pay equity potentially not going forward for many women until 2029–30.

Could you talk about the significance that has?

I see it as a sort of snowball effect. In terms of the longer this takes, the longer women go without, and the longer women go without, actively, in terms of their paycheques, actively in terms of that equality, that human right...can you talk about the impact of that?

Ms. Karen Jensen: Yes. Thank you for that question.

Most employees who are eligible to receive a pay equity adjustment will receive that adjustment the day after the posting of the pay equity plan, which is three years after the coming into force of the legislation. If the act comes into force in 2021, that will mean that, in 2024, we anticipate that most women will begin to receive the pay equity adjustment—if one is necessary—based on the development of the plan.

Under subsection 61(2) of the act, employers can phase in increases over three years—that's for large employers—or five years for smaller employers who have 10 to 99 employees. The adjustments still have to be made starting in the third year after the coming into force of the act and ending in either the sixth or the eighth year after the coming into force.

I would say that, yes, there's a three-year period during which employers and unions, if a pay equity committee is required, will be working to develop a pay equity plan. As many of the members know, the development of a pay equity plan is a complex exercise that takes time, and certainly takes time when it's being done in a committee.

It will, of course, be incumbent upon employers and unions who are working in a pay equity committee to use a collaborative approach in the development of their pay equity plan to avoid having to come to the Pay Equity Commission, to my office, for assistance in resolving disputes. The more they're able to work collaboratively together, the shorter the delay and the greater likelihood that women are going to be able to get the money in an expeditious fashion.

• (1135)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Madam Chair, you were muted. I think you were trying to say that my time was done.

The Chair: Yes, I was.

I was eloquently saying that we were going into our second round of questioning, beginning with Ms. Shin.

Ms. Nelly Shin (Port Moody—Coquitlam, CPC): Thank you so much. I so appreciate your presentations today. I feel that this is the right step forward.

I really appreciated my other colleagues talking about the intersectionality of racialized women and the impact of the two.... My question has to do with the culture and the myths and the stereotypes, and the lack of respect and dignity that is underlying the need for this Pay Equity Act.

Ms. Jensen, when you were receiving those complaints that you referred to as being very painful—those litigations.... When these women complained about unequal pay, were those cases indicative of the systemic lack of equality that our country has acknowledged culturally, or were they specific to certain behaviours and attitudes in the workplace or from the employer?

Ms. Karen Jensen: That's a very interesting question. It really does cause me to reflect on almost three decades now of work that I've been doing in the area of pay equity.

As I mentioned, I saw the toll that this kind of litigation took on the women themselves and also on the employers, who sometimes felt personally attacked that they had a discriminatory wage system in place, and that was never the intention. No one ever intentionally set out to create a system of compensation that was intentionally discriminating against women.

There was a lot of angst and a lot of struggle around realizing that this may have crept into the compensation system, and there were a lot of questions. How did that happen? How in the world could we in Canada have reached this point in time where we still have systems that devalue the work done by women?

The way I try to explain it to employers and to unions alike is that it's a historical problem that has developed over time, whereby certain roles that have been undertaken by women in a home environment—the care of children, administrative duties, social duties, taking care of the family's social agenda, that kind of stuff—have been largely taken for granted and not acknowledged as really valuable work contributing to the economy. That is an attitude that prevailed a long time ago and that found its way into our compensation systems. The kinds of work that women would do—caring for others, cleaning up after a meeting or as a clerk, attending to the needs of a superior—were seen to be somehow less valuable because they came naturally to women; that's just what women did.

When you explain to employers that this is just something that has crept into our system. What we have to do now is remove from women the obligation to complain about that and put the obligation, as we're doing with this proactive legislation, on the employers, saying, “Whether you think you have a problem or not, whether you ever intended to discriminate against women, which we assume you didn't, you now have to look at your compensation systems to find out if, somehow, discriminatory pay practices have crept in. That's your job, and I'm going to ensure that it's done.”

• (1140)

The Chair: Very good.

Now we'll go to Ms. Hutchings.

Ms. Hutchings, you have five minutes.

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Long Range Mountains, Lib.): Thanks, Madam Chair.

Thanks to both of our witnesses today.

Congratulations, Ms. Jensen, on being the first federal commissioner and, Mr. Willbond, on being the director general on this first act of a proactive pay equity plan for our country. Thanks for the work that you've done, and thanks for the hard work that you're going to be doing.

Ms. Jensen, in your opening remarks, you were chatting about the process. Can you go into a little more detail on the consultation process, how you got to where you are and what groups you spoke with and where? Did you get into rural situations, as my colleague...? Ms. Wong always talks about seniors. I always talk about rural areas. Can you give us a few lines on that, please, and on the consultation process?

Ms. Karen Jensen: Absolutely, I'm very happy to do that.

When I first assumed this role as pay equity commissioner in 2019, I was very eager to speak directly with all of the various people involved in the federal jurisdiction—employers, employees, unions, non-governmental organizations such as LEAF and the YWCA, and various other organizations that are active on behalf of women throughout Canada. It was very important to me to hear what the concerns were, and not just from the point of view of how we were going to implement this complicated or challenging legislation, but also the concerns: What's the impact going to be on my business? How are unions going to be able to work effectively with employers when we have a difficult bargaining relationship? What is going to change? How are you going to make this any better for us?

In particular, I wanted to hear from employee organizations about how we could get the word out so that employees across Canada, whether they were in rural settings or urban settings, would know about these rights. In response to some of the suggestions that were made by the stakeholder groups, we've been developing these tools that we hope will respond to the needs. I've been really proactive about it. For example, I did a YouTube video with a woman who has a very wide audience of moms at work. I received enormous feedback from all over the country from women who are mothers who were very confused about what pay equity means and how it relates to their lives and their workplaces and so on.

I'm really committed to using traditional media, social media and every kind of approach I can to reach out. We have a very well-developed communications plan to ensure that we get the word out.

• (1145)

Ms. Gudie Hutchings: Thank you for that answer.

Ms. Jensen, I've heard from many small businesses that they do need that three years. Can you comment on that and tell us why exactly, in your professional opinion, businesses, especially small businesses, need this time to get caught up?

Ms. Karen Jensen: Yes. That relates really to the previous question. The consultations with small businesses and large businesses across Canada have led me to believe that even before the pandemic there were concerns about the challenges associated with implementing pay equity. As I indicated, it's a technical exercise. For small businesses in particular, it's an exercise that's often done by someone with very little training who may be doing it off the side of their desk, so to speak. They require enormous support to be able to do that. We are, as a division, committed to providing that support.

You know, Parliament decided that three years was the appropriate amount of time to give employers to develop a pay equity plan, but was also, I think, thinking that the division—we are legislatively mandated to do this—would provide good educational support to do that. We are doing that. Then, of course, the pandemic hit. Many businesses across Canada in the federal jurisdiction are struggling for their own survival. This time period of three years is important to give those businesses a chance to get their feet back under them, economically speaking, and to get the support they need to develop their plans.

I must say that I am—

The Chair: I'm sorry. That's your time.

We're going now to Madame Larouche.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to talk about the potential impact of the act and its importance during this period of economic recovery as the crisis comes to an end. Women have been far more affected than men by the pandemic. For us to have influence, we must have leverage.

To what extent could pay equity in the government sector affect the achievement of pay equity in the private sector? How might it inspire the entire sector to do more going forward?

Ms. Karen Jensen: Could I clarify?

Are you talking about how pay equity influences the effects of the pandemic?

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Actually, I was saying that, in this period of economic recovery, it is important that the government sector be willing to improve women's wages and reduce the wage gap between men and women. However, the private sector must be just as willing.

How might your actions in the government sector influence the private sector?

Ms. Karen Jensen: You want to know how the government sector influences the private sector?

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: I'm talking about implementing measures. Could this snowball and impact other businesses that are not affected by the act, for example?

Ms. Karen Jensen: I do indeed believe that this legislation will significantly impact not only federally regulated private-sector employers, but also the other provinces in Canada where there is no proactive pay equity legislation.

It's obviously important for the government to take this seriously, and I believe that it's doing so. As head of the country, the government has a responsibility to implement pay equity measures. As I was saying, this is going to not only impact private-sector businesses at the federal level, but also those in the provinces.

As I said in my opening remarks, much good will come from applying the act. I have always insisted that it is good for business, for workers and for the economy. Certainly—

• (1150)

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry. That's all the time for that one.

Ms. Mathysen is next.

You have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you.

One of the things that concerns me, getting back to the continual delays we have seen and the length of time this will take to implement, is that this money is being stolen, ultimately. There are women who are being impacted daily. If someone was stealing money, we wouldn't say they could do it for another few years until we teach them to stop stealing money. You'd stop it right away.

There's an organization called the Canadian Postmasters and Assistants Association. They first filed their pay equity complaints in 1992. It's only in 2020 that this complaint has been rectified and action is being taken on that complaint. In some cases the money owed to these women is paid to their estates because they're not alive anymore.

Can we talk about the potential delays for women? Ms. Wong was talking about seniors. What impact does this have in the long term—the delay on women's pensions, on their benefits and on that idea that there is a longer-term cost to women specifically?

Ms. Karen Jensen: The member has very rightly underscored the reason a complaint-based system is completely inappropriate for addressing gender inequality in wage circumstances. I know about those cases the member is speaking about, the toll it has taken and the amount of money that has been kept from women who rightly deserve it.

I'm only too happy that the complaint-based system is no longer going to be a reality for the vast majority of women in the federal jurisdiction, and that we will have a proactive system.

There is no question that the amount of time it takes to develop a pay equity plan and to put it in place is going to be difficult for many people who have been waiting for a long time for this legislation to come into place and who are very much looking forward to the increases in pay that they are due. That is without a doubt a hard thing for a lot of people to stomach.

I have represented Canada internationally, and we need to be proud of the fact that as a country we are recognized as a leader in the world for enacting this legislation, for getting on with it and for putting in place a pay equity division of the Canadian Human Rights Commission that will support employers and unions to work collaboratively to address the pay equity gaps and to do so in an expeditious fashion.

There are many countries where the legislation—

The Chair: I'm sorry. That's the end of the time for our panel.

Thank you so much to Ms. Jensen and Mr. Willbond for being here today.

For those of you who are going to be participating in our in camera portion, we'll suspend the meeting and you'll have to log back in with the other link that was provided.

Thanks to our witnesses. We're off to our in camera committee report consideration.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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