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Chair

Ms. Marilyn Gladu

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● (0845)

[*English*]

The Chair (Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)): Good morning, colleagues. We're happy to back studying the economic security of women in Canada.

Today we have a number of witnesses with us from universities. We have Richard Nesbitt, a professor at the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto. Welcome, Richard.

Also, we have Marjorie Griffin Cohen, professor emeritus at Simon Fraser University. We're glad to have you with us today.

We're going to start with Richard.

Richard, you have seven minutes.

Professor Richard Nesbitt (Professor, Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I'd like to start by making a few remarks that mirror the written submission I made. I'm very pleased to have this opportunity.

Today I'm going to share some of the research we've done at Rotman School for a book entitled *Ascent*, which is coming out in June, published by Wiley. It's co-authored by Barbara Annis and me. Barbara is a well-known expert in the field of gender diversity, and I'm very proud to have had the good fortune to work with her.

For decades the burden of women achieving parity in leadership, whether in business, education, or government, has been placed squarely and wrongly on the shoulders of women alone. There have been few, if any, expectations specifically placed on men and what men can and should do to support and champion the advancement of women into positions of leadership.

What we need to do to change that is to make the case that is provable, based on evidence from an overwhelming number of experts in the field, a case that matters to those people who are in positions of power. Who are in positions of power? Why, men, of course. This is the challenge that many who have tried to create change in this area have been unable to overcome.

Men have played a very important role in the significant developments involving bringing women into positions where they can achieve the full realization of their potential. Men were the ones who created the legislation to give women the right to vote, and they were the ones who voted on that legislation. Why do we know that? Well, women didn't have the right to vote, so of course they were the only people who did that.

But how about the millions of men who marched in favour of the Equal Rights Amendment in the United States? Also, how about the business clubs that have more recently voted to end the decades-long process of excluding women? Of course, it was men who made these changes.

We're witnessing a growing realization on the part of men in companies around the globe that sharing leadership with women produces superior financial performance. Virtually every study conducted since the 1980s on the financial performance of companies with women on their boards and in positions of leadership has proven this to be true.

There are many male leaders today who are aware of this economic value, and what the vast majority are not aware of is what their roles are in achieving this. If you want your business to perform at peak, you must hire and promote women alongside men into management and elect them to your board of directors.

In the research, we've assembled dozens of studies that research the impact of gender diversity on boards and in management. In all but two papers out of almost 60, it's undeniably positive. The two outlying papers were not negative, but were, instead, neutral, one from Indonesia, and one from South Africa. All of the other papers were uniformly positive.

However, no one has ever said that you just start picking employees at random and that this will result in a better outcome for boards and management teams. You have to look for diverse candidates who will bring the ability to contribute, which will pay off more than sticking to the same tired criteria we used in the past.

An unfortunate fact is that the graduating class from most MBA schools today is only 30% women. It makes it difficult to achieve a 50% gender parity if you're only recruiting from a pool of 30%. But why don't you just widen your net? The fact is that the graduates of the undergraduate commerce program are 57% women, so why not hire these graduates and invest a little more money in training?

It may all start with the board of directors, which I want to focus on for a second. Boards of directors have a lot of power, and we call that corporate governance. Let's go through how they impact gender diversity. First of all, boards choose their own gender composition. Boards choose their own slate of directors who they put forward to the shareholders to vote on. You can tell by the facts of where we are today that most boards are comfortable with having underrepresentation in terms of gender diversity on their boards—quite significantly, as a matter of fact.

Boards choose the gender of the CEO. The only people who hire a CEO are boards, so whenever there's a change in CEO, they have a choice of whether to choose a man or a woman. Also, they're supposed to have a ready and available list of candidates at all times, under good corporate governance practices. Boards, directly or indirectly, influence the composition of the top management team. Ultimately, the CEO hires the top management team, but in most companies there's oversight of that by the board, so they ultimately control the gender composition of their top management team.

Finally, this has a virtuous circle to it. The more women you have on top management teams, the more candidates are then available for boards of directors, because those people would have the requisite experience to sit on boards of directors. This would have an automatic impact of improving the overall situation.

Let me finish with one obvious question. What chance do you think there is that a management team will be gender diverse if the board is not diverse? That's the situation we're in today. Our research on the S&P/TSX 60 largest companies in Canada says there's a direct mathematical correlation between the number of women on boards and the number of women in top management teams. There's a one-year lag. The more women you put on the board, one year later you will start to see more women showing up in the top management teams.

All the work that's going into changing the gender composition of boards is very worthwhile because it will ultimately affect the management leadership of the company, and ultimately that will improve the financial performance and other criteria that we value in our companies.

In conclusion, it is up to men to work with women to achieve this improvement. It's up to men in positions of power to ensure the addition of more women on boards and, ultimately, on the management of their organizations. It's up to men to share leadership with women in their organization, and we need to do that now.

● (0850)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to Marjorie Griffin Cohen.

Marjorie, you have seven minutes.

Professor Marjorie Griffin Cohen (Professor Emeritus, Simon Fraser University, As an Individual): Thank you.

I'm going to talk about only three things today. There is a lot to talk about, but I'm going to focus on gender inequality as related to workplace segregation. I'm going to look at the skilled building trades, teenage work, and a problem with a government program that you may not know too much about.

It's important to look at the skilled building trades, because Canada is now committed to spending many billions of dollars in the near future on improving Canada's infrastructure program. It appears that most of this will be done through the private sector, through P3 arrangements. It also appears that while some social services may be covered, it will primarily focus on physical infrastructure: roads, bridges, transportation, water systems, and maybe even social housing.

These are areas where men overwhelmingly dominate the workforce, accounting for about 97% of all workers. There are a great many reasons for this imbalance, but there are ways in which this can be changed by government, and I'm going to give you an example of one that worked very well. This was in Vancouver, in the 1990s, through the building of the Vancouver Island highway. It happened to pass through first nations land, so they had to have equity initiatives there, and at the same time we had a government that was committed to equity. That worked very well with having a training program for first nations and females to lead into a highway program. This was initially resisted by the private sector and by the unions. Nobody wanted it, but because we had a government that was committed, and because they actually controlled the labour force, which is too complex to explain now, it actually worked.

What I am saying is that there is a way in which this could happen in Canada through project agreements, if the government insisted on it through the P3s—and this should happen, because there is an enormous amount of federal money going into this. What it required was a considerable degree of compulsion on the part of the government initially, because neither contractors nor unions wanted this. A specific clause in the agreement saying that employment equity hiring “shall operate in priority” over other kinds of hiring is also extremely important, as is supportive leadership at the highest level. The premier of the province at the time was supportive of equity.

This was a huge success. Women went from being 2% of the labour force at the beginning to being 20% at a particular point in time. Of course, a new government came in and overturned all of that. It did not continue, but this was something that was extremely successful.

On teenage work.... I've done studies on all of these things, and that's why I'm bringing them up now, but we know very little about what's going on. What is particularly distressing is that in two provinces in Canada the work age is as low as 12, and Statistics Canada takes information only from ages 15 and on, so we don't know what's happening there.

What we do see is that female workers at a very early age are at certain disadvantages. They are more likely to have jobs than their male counterparts. On average, they make less than teenage males. They are more likely to have multiple jobs and to work throughout the year, and they are concentrated in fewer occupations and job categories.

Basically, what I am saying here is that there is too much we don't know about this. Part of the overrepresentation of women in that area of work may be because of the very high costs that have happened since austerity measures in education, and you have more women having to work longer because they make less, and so on. This is something to look at.

The final thing I want to talk about is the Canada research chairs. In 2008, I, with six other full professors in Canada, had a human rights complaint against Industry Canada because of the discriminatory nature of the Canada research chairs program, which is completely covered by the government. We had a win. We had a settlement in 2006, and the government did not meet its obligations.

What we are seeing is that universities are routinely not meeting the targets they are supposed to meet. I should say that the targets are extremely low. They were calculated in the worst possible way, so the targets are bad, and they're not even meeting them. There are no penalties for universities that don't do this.

By the way, I have given you copies of this, so you can see this more in depth. What I am saying is that we are now in a position to ensure that the Canada research chairs program meets the requirements of the human rights settlement of 2006.

● (0855)

By the way, we are either taking this to court or having another mediation. This is coming up and will be in the news soon. It would be a good thing to act on.

We need to revise the methodology, to define the target populations. We have to ensure that the CRC administrators comply with what we agreed to in a speedy and forward-looking manner. They are not doing it either speedily or forward-looking.

A lot of the people who get CRCs don't even apply. It's just a network. We have to be sure there are application processes because it is very poor. There are also limitations. For example, women who are...you can't apply for the lower tier if you are more than 10 years away from your Ph.D. This is problematic because many young women at that particular stage are having their children and thus need to apply later.

I'm going to close by saying that I want to reiterate that the federal government has a responsibility to ensure that its own programs promote equity for groups protected by Canada's human rights legislation, but it should also go further and ensure that when it injects money, whether it's for crisis control or climate change or infrastructure programs, it makes sure that there are equity conditions associated with that.

The Chair: That's excellent. Thank you very much.

I want to welcome my colleagues Ted Falk and Greg Fergus, who are joining our committee today. We're going to begin with my Liberal friends with Ms. Nassif for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to thank all the witnesses.

My first question is for Mr. Nesbitt.

In 2014, you received the Women in Capital Markets Visionary Award for your work on gender diversity within management teams and boards of directors.

How does the financial performance of companies with gender diverse management teams and boards of directors differ from those of companies with predominantly male management teams and boards?

[*English*]

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: Thank you for the question.

Very clearly, companies that have diverse management teams and/or diverse boards perform better from a financial perspective; they have higher earnings, higher return on capital, higher growth and earnings. They also perform better from an environmental perspective and in times of stress, for example, when a CEO resigns. There's a whole bunch of reasons for that.

To achieve that, you've got to get to a minimum critical mass of diversity on a board. Some of the research studies say that there need to be at least three women on boards, making up at least 30% of the board. It's the combination of men and women together that creates the improvement. With one or the other, you cannot get the improvement, but together you can.

● (0900)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: What non-financial benefits, if any, do gender diverse management teams and boards of directors provide to their companies or employees?

[*English*]

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: Obviously there are substantial benefits. In many companies, such as financial services companies, the majority of the employees are women. As we know, more than 50% of university graduates are now women, and in the next decade that will be 60%. You're seeing an entire universe of women who are able to contribute, but their abilities to move into leadership positions has been limited.

I think there's a tremendous number.... There's also social fairness. But I think motivating all your employees by creating an environment of fairness is very important.

I have focused on the financial performance because, quite honestly, that's what talks to men in power.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Griffin Cohen.

Your recently published work, *Public Policy For Women: The State, Income Security, and Labour Market Issues*, focuses on the public policy issues that do not address the needs of women.

In your opinion, which of the federal government's public policies do not address the needs of women? What steps could the federal government take to correct this?

[*English*]

Prof. Marjorie Griffin Cohen: There are things that the federal government does, but generally not very well. One example is gender auditing. Usually auditing comes after the fact and doesn't change anything. That doesn't really help.

Basically, you need to ensure that the examination of how something is going to affect women—any kind of public policy or legislation—happens at a stage when you can actually make a difference in what it looks like.

When we're dealing with very important things that are coming up, whether trade issues, climate change, or micro-level issues related to employment, the government needs to have a clear picture beforehand of what the implications are for women.

I've given you three areas where the federal government could act with regard to very specific labour issues. These are just a drop in a whole sea of things that could happen. It has to do with will and it has to do this with leadership on the part of the government.

By the way, just to respond to the issue of women on boards, it's very important that governments also appoint women to boards and commissions. This can be done extremely effectively. When that happens, you'll see that these companies have more day care centres, for example, available to their employees.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Okay.

My question is for both of you.

What challenges, if any, do male-dominated sectors, especially business and science, technology, engineering and mathematics, present to women who wish to train and work in those sectors?

[*English*]

Prof. Marjorie Griffin Cohen: That is something that people have struggled with for a long time. The barriers are enormous in the universities. Part of it has to do with research funding. It's often presented as though it is because women are selecting to do things in which they're going to earn the least and have the hardest time getting jobs. That isn't what is happening, and there are inroads by brave people in areas that are dominated by men.

This is where public policy can really make a difference. I use the example of the Canada research chairs, because the target is 30%, and they're not even meeting it. That's very low compared to the number of women who have Ph.D.s. It's the kind of thing that can be worked at from the top. You need to work at both the top and the bottom on these issues. Even in the skills trades, women can do these and are happy to do them. They just can't get jobs when they do them.

● (0905)

The Chair: All right, we'll now go to my colleague, Ms. Harder, for seven minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you very much for taking the time to be with us today to share your expertise in this area.

My first questions go to Richard Nesbitt.

Can you comment on what you've seen in your studies on the factors preventing women from being able to enter top positions within business organizations?

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: It's starting to change but it's changing very slowly.

There are some very significant role models out there today. Women role models in senior positions are important, not just to women, but are actually more important to men. Men need to see women in positions of power in order to get comfortable with that. That's starting to happen.

If you look at my written submission, you'll see that I talk about the notion that the first thing you have to do is to fix what we call the "plumbing". There are barriers to entry for women. There are are all sorts of policies, procedures, and processes within corporations, within universities, and within government that basically deter women from applying. They make it harder for women to apply.

A good example is a recruiting night where the only recruitment people there are men, and they're perhaps playing a video of a hockey game as their entertainment. Maybe they have a male hockey star there. They're not doing anything deliberately exclusionary, but we've seen that this can create an environment in which women don't even bother to apply. So, first of all, you have to fix the plumbing.

I would go back to the other speaker's comment that the federal government has a lot of resources through which it could make a change to the situation at no cost, namely making sure that the crown corporation boards and government agencies are all gender diverse. I would set a target for that. I would commit to their all being gender diverse by a certain time. First, that would cause people to comply with that—and there's no reason they can't. Second, it would start to change the organization from within.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Nesbitt, you talk about being gender diverse. I think we have gender diversity. Most boards do have men and women on them. Are you actually saying you want equality, not just diversity?

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: The benefits come from achieving close to gender parity.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Okay.

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: If you had a board of all women, you would not be performing as well as if you had a diverse board of women and men.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Sure. How do you measure parity versus skill set and ability?

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: As I said in my remarks, you can't just go and hire people off the street. You need people who understand business. You need people who understand the industry. You need people who understand corporate governance. But those people are out there. I would leave it to the boards to make that decision, but I'd put the accountability on them to achieve a certain goal.

Ms. Rachael Harder: But you would be saying, of course, both that gender diversity is very important but also skill set. You would be saying that we need to be considering both, not just one over the other.

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: Absolutely. One of the challenges we have on boards today is that even the men on the board don't have the requisite skills—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: —to understand what the management is doing.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I can appreciate that.

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: So, please don't put that imposition on new women coming on the board, when you also should be putting it on the men who are sitting on the board.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I agree. That's why I'm privileged to be a member of the Conservative caucus, where all men and women are equally skilled.

My next question for you, Mr. Nesbitt, is with regard to what women need in order to succeed at those positions that are high up.

This same question will be going to you, as well, Ms. Griffin Cohen.

One of the things I've heard from many of the women entrepreneurs to whom I've talked, or individuals who are seeking high-up positions within businesses or boards, is that they desire mentorship. That's one of the things I hear over and over again. I would love to hear your reflections on what you're seeing as the greatest need that women are communicating.

● (0910)

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: There's nothing wrong with mentorship, but mentorship creates no risk for the person mentoring. The better term nowadays is “sponsorship”. Sponsorship means that the person recommending the woman—the young woman, perhaps—is actually taking a risk. In my work in industry, I was able to promote women into positions of power and take a risk, because maybe they're going to succeed, maybe they're going to fail. It's the same thing with men: maybe they're going to succeed, maybe they're going to fail. But you have to take the risk. That's what's called sponsorship. That's way more important than mentorship. Mentorship is an easy thing that companies and other people do that makes them feel better. It actually doesn't change the dial. But more and more men are getting into the concept of sponsorship. I, personally, must promote men and women into positions of influence, and that's what can really make a difference.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Awesome. Thank you much.

And my question for you is the same, as well.

Prof. Marjorie Griffin Cohen: Thank you. I appreciate that question.

I just want to echo what Professor Nesbitt has said because these are important words.

I do remember someone who had been my mentor once asking me.... I'm an economist, and so that was unusual way back when I became an economist. I said I didn't have any mentors; I had a lot of tormentors.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Prof. Marjorie Griffin Cohen: But anyway, I think that's what a lot of women experience.

I think what is incredibly important is the education of both boards and management, if that's what you're talking about there. But even at the level of tradespeople, you need to have education of employers. The unions are a lot better about this now, but you need to educate employers about what it means to hire women. You also need a critical mass of women. If you put one woman in there or two women in there, they're not going to make a difference, but if you have something near parity then something will happen.

The Chair: Excellent.

Now we'll go to my colleague Ms. Malcolmson for seven minutes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to both the witnesses.

To Professor Griffin Cohen, I'd like to talk a little more about the precarious work elements that you talked about in your testimony and submission.

We heard from Minister Morneau that Canadians should get used to job churn because it's going to happen, and we have to accept that. We're certainly hearing from young Canadians that there's an epidemic of precarious work in Canada, but part of the focus of this study is that this disproportionately affects young people and women —and 39% of Canadians between 15 and 19 are precariously employed.

Because of women's overrepresentation in the service industry, can you talk a bit more about our exposure to that in the context of free trade deals, and how this intersects with jobs and the economic security of women if we don't protect that security in trade deals?

Prof. Marjorie Griffin Cohen: This is quite complex for women now.

Before the free trade deals were put in place, it was pretty clear that women were going to be more narrowly channelled into certain kinds of occupations and certain kinds of sectors. This was because we were going to lose the manufacturing sector where women worked. So we did. We pretty much lost women in manufacturing, because they were heavily concentrated not just in the clothing and textile industries but also in boots and shoes and in small electronics. That was a fairly serious loss. A big change has also occurred with data processing, which then was.... We used to have laws whereby you had to do it here. Now we don't. It's all been taken over. So women lost jobs in important areas.

What's happening now is very hard to say, because I don't know what's going to happen with the trade agreements. We've all changed our economy so much over the past 25 years. It's going to be very scary to see what might happen in the future. I can't speculate on that until I see what is likely to happen.

I think we can probably worry about anything that would.... We have a very segregated employment system. It doesn't look like it, mostly for those of us who are in areas where men and women work together, but by and large it has become more intense. We have more precarious work. Unfortunately, although women have been increasingly represented in trade unions, that is beginning to decline too, because of the structure of the workforce. In a way, more precarious work means less protection.

Through this whole age of austerity, from the 1990s on, we've had less and less protection for workers from the employment standards acts within provinces and labour codes. That's been very hard on women, particularly for the very young teenage workers, because they haven't had those kinds of minimal protections.

● (0915)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Can you also speak a little more in relation to the Canada research chairs' discriminatory practices, as you've described them? What has been the impact of that discrimination on female students and young researchers?

Prof. Marjorie Griffin Cohen: I think that's a really good question. I haven't put my mind to it, on what it means for the researchers themselves, but I think there is a point there. There are fewer role models for young people, fewer people teaching them who have time to do research. That's the important part of these research chairs. People get a lot of time to do research on issues that are important to them, and they may or may not deal with women's issues. Nevertheless, students don't have access to this kind of significant research, so it will have an impact on them.

Thanks for raising that. I think that's another one I'll add when we get to mediation next time around.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you for your work.

Richard Nesbitt, I appreciated your comment that to increase the number of women in leadership positions, we need to examine an uncompetitive or unacceptable maternity leave.

We heard earlier this week from Willem Adema from the OECD. He argued that parental leave needs to be used to change men's participation in child care. That might address some of the gender gap issues we have been seeing between men and women.

Can you talk a little more about what men can do to help remove the barrier to women's participation in the economy, around how we can encourage men to take that parental time off, not just increasing overall maternity leave but assigning it specifically to men, adding parental leave for men, and how that might change the balance in the workplace?

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: I'm not an expert in this area, but in the book that I'm doing with Barbara Annis, we talk about the fact that when I was in my thirties, this was my first exposure to why we need to focus on the position of women in leadership. I didn't care about maternity leave when I was about 35-years old until I had female employees who felt that it was an important issue. They convinced me that it was an important issue for me as well.

Again, this is part of the “fix the plumbing” issue. The content of your maternity policies has to be looked at very carefully. It's not just maternity policy, but also the way women return to work. Sixty per cent of university graduates are women, and a lot of companies today are trying to hire 40% to 50% women in their intake, but we have the problem that as they go up in seniority, we're losing women at each stage of the process.

You have to fix that plumbing. You have to figure out how to get experienced women back into the workforce once the maternity leave is over. Part of fixing that means allowing men to take an equal part in that parental leave as well, by the way.

In the financial services area, they have moved in that direction quite significantly. It's not seen as anything negative if a man takes time off for parental leave.

We need that to permeate the whole economy. First of all, I would recommend that the federal government enable that so it will permeate the organizations it controls, to set an example. I also think that the issue of maternity leave is often used by those in positions of power to say that it is the reason women can't move ahead. It's wrong.

The fact is that if a woman takes one year, two years, or three years off for maternity leave, in the overall context of a career of 30 years, it really has very little impact. It's these other social issues, like the reasons women don't come back from maternity leave and the reasons men are not sharing it, that are more important. I think the federal government should play a leadership role on that.

● (0920)

The Chair: Thank you.

That's your time.

We're going to go to Mr. Fraser for seven minutes.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Thanks very much to both of our witnesses for being here with us this morning.

Ms. Griffin Cohen I'll start with you. You had a couple of very interesting points.

First, on the discriminatory practices you you described pertaining to the Canada research chairs, I'm curious as to whether we see a difference between undergraduate institutions, where we have a greater proportion of women attending as students, and graduate institutions. Out east we have primarily undergraduate institutions. Essentially what I want to know is whether there are places that are doing this well.

Prof. Marjorie Griffin Cohen: There are places that are doing it reasonably well, but because the bar is so low, you can't really say that it's terrific.

I share your instinct that smaller institutions might have a harder time, but it turns out that in many cases they actually are better at it than larger institutions. You can see how they perform, detailed by institutions on the CRC website, and some do reasonably well.

Once again, our issue was with regard to everybody covered by human rights. They tend to focus mostly on women, which is too bad because there are other groups that are very poorly treated in terms of the CRC. Women should be better treated in universities.

Part of the problem is also that there's a big discrepancy between the granting agencies. Women are applying to certain kinds of grant agencies, those pertaining to Canadian social sciences and research in the humanities, as opposed to the science and the medical ones. Those granting agencies get much less money, so there's discrimination at that level as well.

Mr. Sean Fraser: On the CRC website you mentioned, is there a qualitative analysis available as to why some are doing it better than others?

Prof. Marjorie Griffin Cohen: No, there's nothing.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Okay.

Prof. Marjorie Griffin Cohen: They only give you the raw numbers—that's all—and how they reach a target, which I want to stress is extraordinarily low.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I do want to get to Mr. Nesbitt as well.

You mentioned the employment equity provision when we're dealing with major infrastructure spending as being a key thing. I had the benefit of sitting through a study on community benefit agreements, where gender diversity or employing different marginalized sectors of the population could be part of a competitive bidding process. Is that something you think could also work to help bring the numbers up?

Prof. Marjorie Griffin Cohen: I think there's a difference if you have a competitive bidding process with equity as being bid, as opposed to a compulsion that they have to do it. I would favour the compulsion. If you make everybody do it, then everybody bidding will have to account for that in some way.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thanks very much. If I have time, I'll come back.

Mr. Nesbitt, I'd like to touch on a few of the issues you mentioned with respect to boards. There's some very interesting information you described for us on the impact women can have on boards, and the role of men sitting on boards, to enhance diversity. From the federal government's perspective—forgetting, for the moment, crown corporations and government agencies—is there something we can do to encourage the private sector to make those decisions rather than just tell them it's in their self-interest to do it?

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: The Ontario Securities Commission has a comply or explain at a 30% level for women on boards, which I think is a very good first step in terms of getting to the root of this issue. That's had a material impact on the number of women on boards, although a lot of companies are still not complying. I think 45% of public companies on the Toronto stock exchange still have no women on their boards.

That raises the issue of quotas. In the public sector—and I, of course, believe in markets—there's a lot of evidence on what happens with quotas. The greatest case example is in Norway, where they imposed a 40% quota on boards. What happened, unfortunately, was that after they imposed the 40% quota that boards had to comply with, half the companies delisted from the stock exchange and became private companies. The quota had only applied to public companies.

You want to avoid the unintended consequences. Quotas also demean everyone on the board and every candidate on the board because you don't know whether you're put on the board because of a quota or not. I think it's far better to lead by example and encourage the people who are supportive—and there are quite a few men and women—and support those people by leading through example.

I'll go back to the crown corporations and agencies that are in direct control of the federal government. Look at the gender composition of those.

● (0925)

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thanks very much. I think that's a great place to start. I just want to make sure we get the maximum benefit from this kind of a sea change.

We've heard from a number of witnesses, including you, about the educational advantage that women have at the undergraduate level. Is there something you think the federal government can do to take advantage of that competitive advantage women have at the early stage of their education and translate that into success in leadership positions beyond that middle management role where we seem to lose a lot of talent?

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: Again, leading by example would mean that, anywhere the federal government is providing money to any institution or any industry, there should be a requirement for achieving gender parity or near gender parity to get that money. The markets are very important. If I can only get that money at a university, I put forward candidates who are gender-diverse and near gender parity, then you can bet that's what people will do. If you don't have that requirement, we see the other witness telling us that's not what's happening.

The other thing, again, is leading by example, and continuing to promote in federal agencies in a gender diverse way so more women reach the most senior positions. Those women will then sit on boards, and this will result in a virtuous circle. It's pretty clear that women tend to hire more women in companies where they are underrepresented; therefore, you want to generate this virtuous circle.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you very much.

The Chair: We'll go to the second round of questioning of five minutes, starting with my colleague, Mr. Falk.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Thank you, Ms. Chairman.

Professor Nesbitt, I'll begin with you. I was a board chair for a $4 billion financial institution for 17 years. That is a board of nine members currently, three of whom are women. One of the things we often did was to put matrices together in conducting our searches. From your perspective, what kind of weighting would you put on gender versus qualifications? What would be your opinion on that?

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: I wouldn't give up qualifications for gender. There's an irony in that: you don't need to do that. There are plenty of qualified women in the marketplace. You may have to look a little more broadly than business schools or former CEOs, because fewer than 5% of CEOs are women. Therefore, if the criterion is that you must have been a CEO of a public company, you're not going to find many women.

What about a president of a hospital? What about a president of a university? What about a president of a cultural organization? These people have tremendous experience and qualifications. I would venture to say that they have equal or better qualifications than some of the men. At three out of nine, you had achieved that magic 30%, and so you theoretically should have been seeing the benefits of that. You could have had more benefits if you had gone closer to 50%.

Mr. Ted Falk: Thank you.

You've talked a little about some of the barriers to attracting women into that particular area of work. Do you see anything positive happening in the marketplace today?

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: It's actually very positive. It's slow in some cases, but very positive. We know that the banks have achieved their 30% target quite readily in terms of gender diversity. They should start to see the benefits of that now. We have the “comply or explain” legislation at the Ontario Securities Commission for public companies. There are more people who are thinking and talking like me. I have associates from the industry and I'm not the only one who thinks this way in terms of men. They're actually out there actively promoting and sponsoring. I would say we're at the beginning of a crest of a wave of change in this area over the next 10 years.

● (0930)

Mr. Ted Falk: Thank you.

Professor Cohen, I'd like to ask you a few questions. You talked about having women more involved in the trades. I own a heavy construction company. We hire equipment operators; we hire labourers. I don't get a lot of women applying for those types of positions. Can you maybe just explain that a bit?

Prof. Marjorie Griffin Cohen: I'm not surprised because there is a weeding out that begins right at the apprenticeship level—and obviously not for labourers. You have a hiring haul. You have to go through the whole thing where they're lowest on the list; they don't get out. It's very difficult—that is, if you have a union in your company. If you don't have a union, then I don't quite know what your hiring process would be. However, it's extremely difficult. Particularly for electricians, plumbers, other kinds of buildings trades, carpenters, a lot of women go through apprenticeship programs. They can't get paid apprenticeships. That discourages them, or they get them with very, very low wages, less than what the guys are getting. More and more of the building trades aren't unionized now, which becomes problematic as well.

So, there are all kinds of barriers that would prevent you from having people hired there. You could be proactive, if you wanted to be on that, because there are institutes that train women, that are always looking for places to have an apprenticeship held. That's a hard thing for women to get, on-the-job apprenticeship.

Mr. Ted Falk: We have hired women as truck drivers and equipment operators, and our industry is certainly seeing more women entering that area of work. As far as operating the equipment goes, they're very capable and just as skilled as anybody else, but the problem we sometimes encounter is that once they actually have the position, they often want special consideration when it would comes time to shovel out a box of gravel when there is some left that didn't come out when you dumped. They don't think they have to do that, and they think somebody else on the crew should do that.

The Chair: You're out of time.

We're going to Ms. Damoff for five minutes.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you both for being here.

Mr. Nesbitt, I want to talk a little more about boards. We have a bill before Parliament right now dealing with diversity on boards. It is the “comply or explain” type of model that you had mentioned. When the Ontario Securities Commission talked about “comply or explain”, they only saw 1% increase in the number of women on boards. When that report came out, there was an article on the Ontario teachers' pension fund having called for three women on boards or the company would be delisted. That was their suggestion. You don't sound like you're a fan of mandatory quotas. It seems like “comply or explain” doesn't necessarily work. It's been used in Norway. You mentioned that it's also been used in France. Do you have any comment on that?

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: Yes, I would disagree with any view that you would want to delist a company. Delisting a company and taking it away from the transparency and governance of a public company is, on its surface, negative, so I would not see that as the....

Ontario Teachers is a major investor and shareholder. They have the right to invest or not invest in any company they want. That is a more effective solution to this problem. If investors—and they're starting to—begin to understand that companies that are more diverse in their leadership perform better, they will move their money to companies that are more diverse. That would be the greatest impetus for boards and CEOs to change.

“Comply or explain” is a good step because people should be accountable. Unfortunately, what happens is that lawyers write the “explains”. If you try to read some of the explains, they're clearly written by lawyers, and there is no explanation other than they've complied by explaining.

This demonstrates the problem of trying to force people through law to do something they don't really want to do. You want to get them in a position where they want to do it. They want to do it because it will improve their company and their financial performance and so they can continue to receive funding for research from government. They want to do it because the government owns the company and is telling them to do it, and they're the shareholder and have a right to tell them to do it. That to me is a better path.

“Comply or explain” is a good step—I'm not saying it isn't—but don't expect that to change things materially. The marketplace is going to change it.

● (0935)

Ms. Pam Damoff: What about targets? Do you think we should have targets for what we want to see?

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: In terms of the federal government having a target—and I must say Prime Minister Trudeau's approach to this in his government has been very encouraging, but that only goes so far—it's good to lead by example.

I have my own target for anything I run. I attempt to achieve 50% gender parity because I believe my company will run better as a result. I run a research institute today called the Global Risk Institute, which is 50%. I think targets are very good. Every CEO should have targets, not just at the top but at every level of the organization. Every board should have targets.

I think the government can lead by example, by saying their targets throughout the universe of everything they control in the federal government universe has a target of 50%.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I like hockey, by the way, so I wouldn't have a problem going to that. In my riding all the girls with the Oakville Hornets would quite enjoy that as well.

When I went to a dinner last year that Catalyst held, and spoke to the head of General Motors, who said the same thing that you do, that it's good for business having women in leadership and on boards. Why isn't that message getting out? The people who are doing it know that it affects the bottom line, but it just doesn't seem to be resonating with the 45% of companies that don't have any women on their boards.

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: The answer is that it's starting to get out. Catalyst has done a good job in making sure that large companies are doing something about it.

I think you can split men into three different groups: the 20% who are very active in sponsoring women, who believe in this, and are doing it; the 20% who don't believe it, aren't going to do anything about it, and who today often occupy positions of power; and the 60% in the middle. To the men in the middle, it's they're okay with it, but they don't know what to do and don't know that it's their responsibility. We're saying to those 60% of men that it is their responsibility.

I would say to General Motors, since they believe it, let's see their actions. What does their board look like, their senior management, the hierarchy of their management? By the way, General Motors has done some really good things, as have many corporations. I think that progress is happening; it's slow for some people, though.

The Chair: That's excellent.

All right. We have time for one last five-minute question, so Mr. Falk, you could get an answer to your question.

Mr. Ted Falk: Great, thank you, Ms. Chairwoman, I'm going to do that.

I'm going to go back to Professor Cohen and just say, re-ask the question. We would hire women for—

Prof. Marjorie Griffin Cohen: Yes, I heard it.

Mr. Ted Falk: —truck driving positions, and they didn't always want to do the whole job. We paid them the same.

Prof. Marjorie Griffin Cohen: I do want to say that this is the kind of thing that was heard at the beginning of the Vancouver Island highway, and afterward the employers and the unions were both very, very happy with what had happened. The women got hired and the company was happy to hire them afterward; so I don't know, maybe you got one lazy woman, maybe you heard the story wrong, or who knows? But whatever was going on, this is not necessarily what happens all the time, and women aren't necessarily the laggards.

I do want to say one other thing. We do have employment equity legislation in Canada, and that's something to remember for the federal government. We used to have the power of the contractor's compliance program in that everyone who worked for the federal government, who had a contract, had to have some indication of what their equity program was going to be. Now that did fall into abeyance, but it is something that could be brought forward again, and it's a very, very important tool, so that if the government is spending a lot of money and is paying somebody to do something, it can be sure there is some kind of accountability with regard to equity for all the people protected by the human rights legislation.

● (0940)

Mr. Ted Falk: Okay, thank you.

Professor Nesbitt, I'll just come back to you. I got onto an airplane last week and there were two executives walking in, a male and a female, and the male sat beside me in the business section, and the female walked by and she said, “Well, John, aren't you going to give up your seat for a woman?” and she walked back to economy.

Like, why would she do that?

Prof. Marjorie Griffin Cohen: Really...?

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: Human beings have many frailties and weaknesses. And by the way, we could have a story about a man who did something that was untoward. Right? So I don't think we can take any individual circumstance, and I think we have to keep a sense of humour about all of this.

Mr. Ted Falk: Okay, good. Thank you.

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: And that was probably a joke.

Mr. Ted Falk: Okay.

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: It's normal human nature to sort of say I wish I could sit up in business class, except my policy says I have to go to the back of the plane. So we have to be able to take a joke.

Mr. Ted Falk: Okay, thank you. That's fair.

I'd like to share my time with my colleague.

The Chair: All right.

Go ahead, Ms. Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

Mr. Nesbitt, my background is researching sociology, so I understand that when we do research, of course, there are control factors that have to be accounted for. And, of course, research can be interpreted in a variety of ways. You can read things into it, should you wish to.

I'm curious with regard to the studies you've done. Have you looked at every sector across the board, and have you found the same thing, that it is in fact true that close to an equal number of men and women always results in greater productivity, regardless of the sector you're looking at?

Prof. Richard Nesbitt: We're relying on other researchers generally, and they are looking at public companies most often, because that's where you can get the data, and it's on a very geographic-diverse basis. So this applies in China just as much as it does in Europe or as it does in Canada. I'm confident that the results are pretty clear and they're pretty universal.

Some people would argue that what you're measuring is not causation. You're just observing something that's happening. I think that's a cop-out. To say if we have 58 out of 60 studies saying that it's going to improve your company, I think that's pretty good evidence that it's going to improve your company.

It's more difficult in social sciences, as you would know, to prove causation. But I think we can be pretty sure that there's something going on here, particularly when you start to see there's a mathematical relationship in this in terms of adding one more woman and your company improves even more. But you will never be able to get over that argument. And if we allow people to say that this is not proving causation, therefore we should ignore it, I think it's a cop-out.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Sir—

The Chair: Okay, that's the end of our session, sadly.

I want to thank our witnesses. If you think of something that you think might help the study that we're doing, feel free to submit that to the clerk.

And for the committee, the clerk has informed me that the budget for the study is now available. It's $39,200. It's a deal. Although you have not seen the budget, I could accept a motion today to approve the budget; or if you prefer, I could send you the budget and you could look at it and we could have that motion next Tuesday.

I hear the latter. All right. We shall send that out to you.

We're going to suspend while we change panels. Thanks again to our witnesses.

● (0940)

(Pause)

● (0945)

The Chair: We're ready to begin our second panel.

We're very fortunate to have folks with us by teleconference today. We have Tammy Schirle, associate professor in the department of economics at Wilfrid Laurier, coming to us by video conference in a moment. We also have Margot Young, a professor at the University of British Columbia, who probably deserves a medal because, if you consider the time differential, it's quite early for her.

Margot, we give you an extra gold star for being here at this time of the morning.

Then we're very fortunate to have Ramona Lumpkin, the president and vice-chancellor of Mount Saint Vincent University, with us in person today.

We're going to start off with each of you having seven minutes for your comments, beginning with Ms. Schirle.

Dr. Tammy Schirle (Associate Professor, Department of Economics, Wilfrid Laurier University, As an Individual): Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. I am currently an associate professor of economics at Wilfrid Laurier University. I specialize in labour economics with a focus on issues related to public policy, gender, and retirement.

Broadly speaking, I believe the economic security of women has improved substantially over the past 50 years. I suggest this is largely due to women's increased participation in the paid-labour market, providing women with earnings, pensions, and other income that is independent of the decisions of their spouse.

In my short time I would like to bring three items to the committee's attention. First, I will suggest improvements to the working incoming tax benefit that would promote greater independence of women in their career decisions. Second, I will suggest a general review of income-tested benefits available to older women. Third, I will highlight my current work on gender wage gaps, demonstrating that the wage premium enjoyed in male-dominated occupations does not simply reflect greater skills being used in those male-dominated occupations.

First, I will discuss the working income tax benefit, or WITB. The WITB is a non-refundable tax credit that offers a wage subsidy to some individuals with low annual earnings. The current program offers a 25% wage subsidy, which will increase to 26% in 2019. The wage subsidy increases the effective wage rate, and evidence suggests this will push low-wage workers to increase how much they work in a year. As such, the WITB can work to promote attachment to paid work and lead to greater economic security in the future.

However, there are two problems with the WITB. First, for married women, eligibility depends on a couple's income. In practice, this means a low-wage woman's effective wage rate depends on the decisions of her spouse. In general, it is suggested that, in the interest of promoting and supporting gender equity, policies affecting labour market incentives should focus on the individual unit when assessing income rather than on the family.

Second, in cases where both spouses are low earners, only one member of the couple can apply for the WITB. This means a woman must negotiate with her spouse to be eligible for the subsidy. Again, this implies a low-wage woman's effective wage rate depends on the decisions of her spouse.

For these reasons, I suggest that section 122.7 of the Income Tax Act be amended to make the WITB eligibility depend on individuals', rather than couples', circumstances.

I will now now discuss income-tested benefits available to older individuals. Canada's retirement income system was largely designed in the 1960s and 1970s. Many of its characteristics reflect how families organized themselves at that time. The system needs updating to better reflect current and future family structure. As an example, I would like to highlight the availability of the allowance under part III of the Old Age Security Act. In cases where a spouse of a pensioner is aged 60 to 64 or a widow is aged 60 to 64, an income supplement or allowance is available. This policy recognized that most women are younger than their husbands, and there is limited attachment to the labour market among older generations.

However, there are no similar benefits available to low-income women aged 60 to 64 who are divorced or simply never married. As a broad statement, I believe it would be useful to undertake a serious review of the various policies supporting older Canadians embedded in our tax system and the retirement income system. There are many opportunities to better target those most in need, make the system more transparent to taxpayers, and update the system to better meet the needs of current and future generations of women.

Finally, I want to highlight some of the gender wage gap research I have under way. As you know, women earn a lower hourly wage on average than men. Economists spend a lot of time trying to break apart that difference and understand what drives it. One thing is clear: occupational segregation drives a large part of that wage gap.

We question whether the wage premium enjoyed in male-dominated occupations seems justified, in the sense that some jobs require more skill, and employers would reasonably pay higher wages for high-skills jobs. We separately examined industries to recognize that different industries require and value different skills. Our results provide clear evidence that the male wage premium is not universally justified. There are a handful of industries in which the wage premium seems justified as paying higher wages for higher skills. However, in many industries the part of the wage gap explained by occupational segregation does not represent a gender gap in skills. It is simply a premium enjoyed in male-dominated occupations that, from our vantage point, cannot be explained.

● (0950)

As a work in progress, using Statistics Canada's confidential data in our research data centre, I'm not able at this time to present detailed results, but I can offer a copy of our report in March.

I suggest that the type of research we are doing could be used as an evidence base in the development of new pay equity policies applied at an industry level in the private sector. While largely under provincial jurisdiction, there are opportunities within the federal jurisdiction to advance pay equity in the private sector.

Thank you for your attention today. I am happy to answer any of your questions.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We'll now go to Margot Young, out at UBC. You have seven minutes.

Would you turn on your microphone, please. We can't hear you yet. All right, we'll give you some time to work on that with our audio folks.

In the meantime, we will go to Ms. Ramona Lumpkin. You have seven minutes.

● (0955)

Ms. Ramona Lumpkin (President and Vice-Chancellor, Mount Saint Vincent University, As an Individual): Thanks very much, and thanks for the opportunity to speak with the committee today on its important work.

My appearance here today is serendipitous. I was scheduled to meet yesterday with Elizabeth May, Marilyn Gladu, and Sheila Malcolmson about their work on the all-party women's caucus in connection with some work I'm doing with Universities Canada, and Marilyn said, “Oh, are you free tomorrow morning?” I was, so I am here, and delighted to be here.

I have been engaged with Universities Canada, where I'm a board member, on work to promote women's leadership at Canadian universities over the past almost two years. We recognize that, as in many other sectors, women's leadership in Canadian universities has been stuck for almost two decades. About 20% of our 97 Canadian university presidents are women now, and that has been the case for about the last two decades. We wonder why. We are very concerned that there are patterns here and that there are forces happening that we should examine, analyze, and try to change. We are seeking advice and support from other advocacy groups for women's leadership as well, and hoping that in the work we do we can start to see some significant progress.

You would think that in higher education, where, as we know, over half of the undergraduates now are women and in many fields women's participation is growing rapidly, we would have that senior leadership, but that is not the case.

My university, Mount Saint Vincent University, since its beginning in the mid-19th century, has had a core focus on women in leadership. We were founded by the Sisters of Charity of Halifax and, in fact, became the first degree-granting college for women in the British Commonwealth, so we have a very strong mandate to advance women's opportunities in leadership.

We host the Atlantic women in science and engineering chair. There was discussion earlier this morning about the need to advance women in science and engineering and the work that's being done, and that chair...both research and camps for girls, getting them at grade 7 or grade 8 and talking to them about persisting in math and engineering. Those things are, we think, going to make a difference in the long term.

We are also the home of the Centre for Women in Business, the only university-based centre for women in business in the country. They've been doing interesting work for many years now in areas such as supplier diversity, which looks at requiring companies that get federal contracts to show diversity in the suppliers they're engaging.

There are many things at work in the issues we still face with regard to women's economic participation in our country's well-being and women's opportunities for leadership. We've certainly made progress over the last 150 years, but we've hit a plateau in many cases, and progress now seems slower than it was in earlier periods.

Many of us are working, as your committee is—for which we can be very grateful—to root out the causes and, more importantly, to look at forging some solutions. Some of the causes are structural, and we have quite a lot of research to show that. Professor Nesbitt referred to the "plumbing". Another metaphor that a colleague of mine used, which I like very much, is "The boys built the playground": the equipment, the slides, the swings, it's all made to fit the traditional patterns of male participation in the workforce. I think it's important—and Professor Nesbitt mentioned this as well—that there is no pernicious plot to keep women out on the part of the boys who built that playground. It has just been naturalized. It feels right that things are organized in that way.

● (1000)

We have to start picking that apart and finding out what's in fact not natural but constructed, and what can be changed. For example, because of the way things are structured, and partly because of home and family responsibilities, which still rest predominantly with women, women won't have necessarily the opportunity to network after hours, to hang out and make those business contacts and have the opportunity to connect with mentors and sponsors. One field where my university does offer a degree is in hospitality and tourism, and in that field you progress by being moved to different markets in progressively more senior positions. Again, there's a pattern in our playground where the men will move with families, but women have traditionally been much less mobile, much less prepared to move their family with them for their work. This is true not only in the hospitality industry, but it's also true in banking. It's true in many sectors.

Am I out of time?

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Ms. Ramona Lumpkin: I didn't have time to prepare, so I'm obviously finding some things to say. Some of it is cultural and more subtle. I think certainly in my experience the voice of authority is the bass voice. We hear that. I still find that many young women whom I mentor on my campus come to me and talk about their lack of confidence, their lack of belief that they can step up and say,"Put me in, coach. I'm ready to do the job." They don't have that ingrained confidence that I think many of our young men do. There are many more subtle things in culture that we also are going to need to work on changing. I'll stop there.

The Chair: Excellent.

Now we're going to try again with Margot Young at UBC.

Go ahead.

Professor Margot Young (Professor, Allard School of Law, University of British Columbia, As an Individual): Thanks. It's a real pleasure to be able to speak with the committee this morning.

My professional work focuses on issues of women's equality, specifically in reference to constitutional law, international human rights, and social justice and the law. I've worked with a number of women's equality-seeking groups at both the national and the provincial level, in particular in relation to women's rights and Canada's obligation at the United Nations with respect to women's rights.

I've circulated the remarks I'm making this morning to each of you, along with packages of some materials on the subject matter I'm talking about. That message sits somewhere, I'm sure, amidst dozens of others in your parliamentary mailboxes.

Today I want to urge the committee to recommend that the federal government develop and implement a national gender equality strategy. There are three points I want to make in relation to this topic.

First, I would like to talk briefly about why a national gender equality strategy is desirable. Second, I would like to talk about some specific characteristics of a human rights framework that such a strategy must have. Then I have a few key issues to mention that need to be included in the strategy.

The first topic is why would we want a national gender equity strategy? Discussions of gender inequality commonly reference the notion of systemic inequality. We have done this already this morning. That's the recognition that unequal outcomes result for the institutions and structures of society—political, economic, and social—independent of discrimination or animus that is individual in origin.

It's a complex of institutional practices, attitudes and stereotypes, economic structures, and patterns of social relations that account most meaningfully, most predictably, and most intractably for women's inequality.

The result is that the policy that addresses women's inequality needs to be multifocal, and it needs to look at how these different systemic mechanisms pile onto each other augment and enhance each other. This means that effective policy development and implementation to address women's inequality requires a coherent and a coordinated line of policy. Identification of policy objectives, stages of action, and legislative coordination are key tools for effective policy implementation in this area.

Canada's federal government has already recognized the wisdom of this approach to complex problems by committing to a national housing strategy and a national poverty reduction strategy.

By the same logic, the time is now to commit to a national gender equality strategy. Development of this strategy will mean that policies are more effective, more coherent, and will also communicate that the government takes seriously its obligation to gender equality, and that the government is committed to effective change.

The second point I want to raise has to do with the ways in which a national gender equality strategy would be the fulfillment of Canada's international human rights obligations and, I would argue, its constitutional equality obligations.

As you all know, in 1980 Canada signed on to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. As a state party to this convention, Canada ideally comes up every four years, albeit not in reality every four years, for what's known as a periodic review before the committee that administers women's convention. The last review took place this last fall, and on November 18 the CEDAW committee released its concluding observations on Canada.

In those concluding observations, the committee emphasizes, importantly, that the Government of Canada needs to implement a national gender strategy, policy, and action plan that addresses the following:

> the structural factors causing persistent inequalities, including intersecting forms of discrimination, against women and girls, with a special focus on disadvantaged groups of women and girls, including First Nations, Inuit, Métis, Afro-Canadian, disabled, migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking, single parent, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and intersex women and girls.

So it's clear that this committee of women's human rights experts, charged by the United States, considers a national gender equality strategy to be a best practice for meeting Canada's human rights obligations under the women's convention. Indeed, Canadian women agree with this.

● (1005)

Just over a week ago, a national campaign was launched with dozens of organizations representing thousands of women signing on to a letter to the Prime Minister calling for a national gender equality strategy. Now, there are a number of key features that mark such a strategy as a human rights document or that mark it as proceeding from a human rights framework. I don't have time to go over these in detail, but I'll list them simply.

First of all, of course, the content, the issues addressed, reflect entitlements that women have, which means these are basically not bargained away or instrumentalized in terms of other objectives such as budgetary concerns or other political goals.

Secondly, a human rights framework demands, as the UN's framing of its recommendation to Canada shows, a commitment to addressing the issues of the most vulnerable and marginalized women as a priority, and a commitment to hearing the voices of those women in the process of structuring the strategy.

Finally, we know that human rights cast collective duties on the government. It's the government's obligation to deliver these conditions of equality; and a strategy must have effective accountability mechanisms, benchmarks, oversight mechanisms, and time frames that ensure that it's an effective policy.

My last point is simply to flag a couple of substantive issues that a national gender equality policy must address. Of course, these are not the only issues that are critical. In the materials I've circulated, there are some important documents set out from the Feminist Alliance for International Action; a list of the policy recommendations from the CEDAW committee; and also a list of those that could be implemented by the federal government within the next 12 months.

Among these is the expression of the key, central need for a national child care framework that ensures universal, available, affordable child care access for all Canadian women. The role that the national government plays in relation to medicare is equivalent to the role that we need our federal government to play in relation to child care. Until quality child care is universally available, progress on other fronts of women's economic inequality will be stalled.

Secondly, adequate housing is of course a key concern. We've been told by the United Nations special rapporteur that Canada has a housing crisis. We need a gender-sensitive approach as the national housing strategy is developed.

Similarly, the national poverty reduction strategy has to reflect the fact that the poverty of women is deeper and different from the poverty men experience. The poorest of the poor are women and we need to have a gender-sensitive lens in crafting the national poverty reduction strategy.

Finally, I want to conclude simply by noting that national strategies address important areas of human rights observance and, currently, failures. This necessitates as well coordination across strategies. Human rights concerns are linked; systems function not in silos, but they network. Strategies have to reflect this. I've already talked about how the strategies around adequate housing, the right to adequate housing, and the right to income security must necessarily have a gendered face. We need to recognize that as we deal with women's inequality and develop strategies to address it. We need a productive synergy across key equality measures respecting the human rights of women, and really, the key to all of this, from the perspective of this committee, is the calculated oversight that a thoughtful national gender equality strategy can deliver.

Thank you.

● (1010)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to begin our first round of questioning with Ms. Ludwig for seven minutes.

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you all for your presentations. I'm going to go a little differently with my questions, and direct them more at the university level. We often look to the universities in Canada for leadership and we know from Statistics Canada that more than a half of the students in undergraduate programs, and even in many graduate programs, are women, but as we go to the doctoral level, we see a decline. We also know statistically that there is a marked increase in online education nationally. So that's where my questions are going to based.

I did my first two degrees at the University of Guelph, face to face. I did my third degree in combination, while I was married with two children. When I worked on my Ph.D., I definitely saw a difference in the number of women and men in the programs. As well, when I was the associate dean of faculty with an east coast university, I saw that a number of women whom we would hire would teach part-time. That's the other element I want to focus on, part-time teaching.

I'm wondering, from your experience, whether part-time teaching as well as online delivery feed into the economic insecurity of women.

Ms. Ramona Lumpkin: I'm happy to say something about online delivery or technological delivery, in particular with regard to my own institution. We were the first university in Atlantic Canada to offer degrees via television, almost 30 years ago. That was predominantly to make higher education accessible to women, because of our particular mission. We are public now, but I think the university was still owned by the Sisters of Charity at that time. We've morphed, of course, from televised courses to online learning, and we offer both face-to-face and online. It certainly is the case that, for many working mothers, for many women, being able to have that flexibility and access does open doors to pursue higher education. It's not necessarily an economic disservice to women and to those in lower economic brackets to offer courses online. It can really help students in their access.

I'll see if my colleagues want to speak.

● (1015)

Ms. Karen Ludwig: If I could just jump in there as well, on the part-time teaching side, I did my research on the experiences of part-time online teachers, and many of them talked about the physical isolation, and also the fact that, in studying in a Ph.D. program, many students go in assuming they will have a position of tenure as an opportunity. Unfortunately, we know from public universities in Canada that this is not the case. Many of them were actually piecing together an income with part-time online education, which had no benefits, no pension. Although universities across the country have policies, typically, on the the maximum number of online courses someone could teach at one university, the universities are not taking into consideration—maybe they can't—the number of people and faculty who are actually teaching at multiple universities and colleges at one time, not only in Canada but also internationally. They're not making that mentorship connection with their peers or gaining the in-depth conversation that they would have one-on-one if they were physically at a university.

Ms. Ramona Lumpkin: That's right. Certainly in our case, most of our online courses are taught by full-time faculty; it's part of their normal load. So you're looking at those two as an intersection.

I'll just focus for a moment on part-time faculty. Anyone can see the statistics that across the country and across North America, there's an increasing percentage of courses taught by part-time faculty. It's quite mixed. In law or in medicine, for example, they may be practitioners. There may be very valid reasons for using those professional people as part of their contributions back to their profession. It is the case, with the shift in university funding over the past decades, that the ability to hire and invest in a faculty member who would receive tenure—and if things work well, and they usually do—and be with the institution for life, is the biggest financial risk that a university takes, if you like. Universities have increasingly hedged those risks by using part-timers until they're certain there's sufficient enrolment, for example, in an area to warrant adding a full-time position.

Sorry, I should let my colleagues answer as well.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Thank you.

Prof. Margot Young: I'll jump in, if that's okay.

I'm currently chair of the status of women committee at UBC, and I also sit on a number of university-wide equity and diversity committees. The situation of women in the academy is one that I spend a lot of time thinking about in the administration portion of my job. I would begin by saying that there are significant gender issues at our universities, both at the faculty level and in the student cohort.

From the perspective of the faculty, I'll name just a few of the issues that we're currently grappling with at UBC. The first is women's slower progress through the ranks. As you look at the numbers of women at the assistant professor level, you'll see they drop off as you get up to full professor. Women are less likely to become full professors in the academy, and when they do, they do so more slowly.

The topic of contract teaching is an important one, of sessionals and instructors. It functions now as a kind of job [*Inaudible—editor*] for individuals who have their Ph.D.s, who want tenure-track jobs, but instead are given contract teaching that is, essentially, exploitative and covers off on the teaching needs of the university, without delivering the kinds of benefits of the job that a tenure-stream position would. It's not the case that people in contract teaching positions predictably and reliably move into tenure-track positions; for many of them, they carry the work of the university at significantly lower pay, more extreme workload, and without the prospect of the kind of academic process or progress that one traditionally expects.

We also have pay equity issues, particularly amongst contract faculty but also at the tenure-stream faculty level.

I'll just close the focus on faculty by mentioning, and I think you've already heard about gender discrimination—

The Chair: Sorry, that's your time.

We're going to have to move to the questioning from Miss Harder for seven minutes. Thank you.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

My first question here is for Tammy Schirle. You talked about how there is a male wage premium and about the fact this is not justified. I'm wondering if you can expand on that a little bit. In your explanation, please talk a little bit about specific sectors or areas where you see this taking place.

● (1020)

Dr. Tammy Schirle: We're at a stage in our research where we're trying to parcel out which industries are the worst offenders with these types of wage premiums in male-dominated occupations that we can't justify. One that I've seen consistently has been in construction. The construction of buildings is an industry where this seems to happen. It doesn't seem to be happening in the professional or technical services types of fields. There aren't any occupational differences representing skills differences in hospital-type industries. There are not large wage gaps, and there doesn't seem to be the same kind of male premium.

What we're doing right now is trying to figure out how to gauge which industries seem to be having the biggest problems and narrow it down a little bit more.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Just to expand on that a little bit, when you talk about an industry like construction, I think that's probably one that stands out to all of us. It's maybe an example that would naturally come to mind.

With that, I'm just curious whether you are taking and comparing a man and a woman with the exact same skill set and seeing that there is a difference in the wages that they earn within the construction sector. Is that what you're seeing?

Dr. Tammy Schirle: Basically, yes. It's a little bit difficult. It's a statistical exercise, so it's not such an easy match. Nonetheless, we've created measures that summarize the fine motor skills, the physical strength, the social skills, the interpersonal skills, and the analytical skills that have to go into one's job. That's what we call a NOC, a four-digit level, occupation level. It's a fairly fine level there. We can use that to compare across the male-dominated and female-dominated jobs. Where we would see an overall similar skill level on those dimensions, we see different wage rates.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Okay, thank you very much. That's helpful

My next question goes to Ms. Lumpkin.

Thank you so much for joining us at the last minute. We certainly appreciate having you here.

You commented on women often lacking the courage or confidence to initiate and pursue some of those higher-up positions, I suppose you could say. I'm just wondering if you can comment why women might be a bit hesitant to do so.

Ms. Ramona Lumpkin: I do think it's primarily cultural. As so many gender differences are, though, it's hard to get to nature versus nurture dimensions definitively with every trade. But certainly, girls and young women want to have every skill that's required for a particular position before they will volunteer for it.

If you have a team sitting around a table, and there's a project put out, we so often see young men, if they know about 60% of what needs to be done, putting up their hands and saying, “I'd like to try it”, whereas women are sitting there wanting to feel they've got 100% or 120% of the required skills before they volunteer for it. It goes right through youth into maturity.

I think we obviously need to have intervention. Some of it is probably happening in the classroom; some of it is happening at home. We need to be extremely aware of this gender-based tendency and need to start intervening at a very young age to encourage girls to take risks and to try things they're not necessarily certain they can succeed at.

Ms. Rachael Harder: One of the things that Mr. Nesbitt talked about in the previous presentation was sponsorship, coming onside with women in order to empower them to step into those positions. Is this something that you feel would be helpful when it comes to helping women move into those spots and feel more confident and courageous in putting their names forward?

Ms. Ramona Lumpkin: Absolutely. It's been very heartening to see pilots for sponsorship. I was reading about one recently in a business report, in which a young woman is challenging and engaging other people within the company to take on a sponsorship, and then they choose to sponsor a woman and they tag someone else and ask whom they are sponsoring. I think we have to be intentional to shift from the mentorship to the sponsorship, and I think it can make a huge difference.

● (1025)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Okay.

I'd also be interested in your observation. Would you say that a woman is more likely to come on side and sponsor a woman, or is a man more likely to come on side and sponsor a woman?

Ms. Ramona Lumpkin: The studies that I've seen suggest that it can be a little more awkward for a man to sponsor a woman. There are a lot of cultural things around.... You know, they do the same things as guys do. There was mention of a hockey game; they go to the hockey game together. There tend to be gender-divided activities that make one gender more comfortable with the same gender. I think men may fear looking as if they're predatory; so there are those kinds of barriers as well. That's why it's important to signal to men that, hey, it's okay, we're all sponsoring women, and to make it more accepted.

I certainly have seen a lot of female-to-female sponsorship over my career. I'm a member of the International Women's Forum, for example, and we make a very concerted effort to identify and tap younger women and do more than just mentor, but sponsor.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

The Chair: All right.

We'll go to Ms. Malcolmson for seven minutes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to Margot Young, from UBC's Allard School of Law. I love to hear your celebration of the need for Canada to commit to its decades old United Nations promises, and your alignment with the United Nations committee to end discrimination against women. Its report, in November, flagged that successive Conservative and Liberal governments have failed to honour those commitments. We've had, this week, top of the fold stories every day on the police failure to honour sexual assault complaints. I note that UN CEDAW said that, if we had a national framework around ending violence against women that would have included the police response, that the federal government would be taking leadership to make sure that justice and police responses are trauma informed and are gender sensitive and we have a consistent level of training.

If Canada had led in that area, can you speculate about how our countries response to sexual violence and rape might have panned out instead?

Prof. Margot Young: I think the answer to that is an obvious one. If we'd led in the area, with a criminal justice system that is victim-centric, that understands the gendered systemic nature, the kind of rape culture that characterizes our nation and others as well, I think we would have done a much better job in reporting under our human rights obligations and we wouldn't find such a high rate of unfounding of sexual assault complaints or claims that are taken to police. It's an issue we struggle with everywhere in Canada. We're struggling with it at the University of British Columbia. I sit on the president's steering committee on developing a sexual assault policy for us right now. It raises a series of really tough issues, but essentially, it's important to be conscious and articulate about undoing the kind of sexist stereotypes that exist in this area of the law, its implementation, and its administration at all levels.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you.

I'd like to take you to another area of your work and also an area that the United Nations has commented on, which is the impact, particularly on indigenous women, of climate change and of investment in resource extraction projects.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on how projects, such as new pipeline and mega-project construction and other resource-based development, can have the impact of negatively affecting the economic security of indigenous women in particular.

Prof. Margot Young: I can speak generally to this. There's a lot of literature documenting this in relation to specific climate challenges, but it is the case that women are distinctively and differently vulnerable to the ravages of climate degradation. This is particularly true for indigenous women, who very often live close to large extractive industry sites. We see that women's vulnerability is an economic vulnerability. The kinds of jobs that are generated by extractive industries and the impact on the economy when those jobs fluctuate is often felt quite distinctly and negatively by women.

I'm going to add a little to that scenario—and I think this is common knowledge, of course—that women have a unique and amplified physical vulnerability to environmental toxins. The reproductive health consequences for these indigenous women who live close to these extractive industrial sites are really quite significant as well. We're seeing different indigenous populations across Canada being disproportionately and negatively affected by environmental contamination, not just from extractive industries, but also from tailings or toxins, leaks, and those sorts of things.

It really points again to the need to think about the gendered consequences and to have a lens that allows you access to the gender inequality consequences across a range of policy options. Really, what a national gender equality strategy would allow is the kind of systematic thinking about this issue that really would make the change to women's status in Canada.

● (1030)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you. I appreciate your advocacy and research, because we need to break through this plateau that we've reached.

I'm going to switch my focus to Dr. Lumpkin. Thank you for being here today.

I want to start with a university-related story, just in response to my colleague MP Falk's comments about women entering construction. The university in my riding is Vancouver Island University. I've been hearing from the people who are training the heavy equipment operators—which are increasingly expensive and high-tech. This whole generation grew up on computer games. They say in my region, with its mining and forestry companies, that they're biasing their hiring towards women because they are more respectful of this extremely expensive equipment. They have a more subtle touch, so they have fewer equipment rollovers and so on.

But I'll leave that with you in your work, both on the university side and leadership.

I'd like to hear a bit more about the work you've done in Halifax, especially with YWCA. Perhaps you can offer the committee some reflections on the kinds of economic struggles of some of the women you've been personally mentoring, and especially the effects of poverty on their even entering the workplace in the first place.

Ms. Ramona Lumpkin: Thank you. I'd be happy to talk about that.

I do sit on an advisory committee to the YWCA Halifax. It's a program working with very marginalized, low-income women, trying to help them develop some very basic skills—confidence, resumé writing, even dressing for interviews—to move them into work experience and help them achieve economic security for themselves and, in many cases, their children.

The women who are part of that program have faced and struggled with extreme challenges. The program that is currently being run, which is federally funded, puts them into 12-week placements so they get work experience in places like libraries, in senior care, and with the homeless. Many of them want to work with children in children's centres. Our advisory group sees through this program the enormous hill that these women have to climb; and I'll share this.

Most recently, with the intake of 12 women, the staff member who runs the program is saying that this is the most gung-ho, excited, committed group she's worked with in the program. They always show up for the training. But she's had real difficulty finding job placements for them because, in this instance, and perhaps uncharacteristically in the program, seven out of 12 of them have criminal records. They've been tagged for assault or for theft. Who knows what is behind that and what kind of desperation drove them or led them to run into trouble with the law? So, they're now triply disadvantaged in even being able to get a work placement. We're all putting our shoulders to the wheel trying to find places that will take them and give them that job experience. Down the road they may be eligible to pay for a pardon and so on. These are women with children—

The Chair: I'm sorry, but that's your time.

Ms. Ramona Lumpkin: —who are trying to make a life for themselves.

The Chair: We'll go now to Ms. Damoff for her seven minutes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thanks, and I'm going to share my time with Mr. Fergus.

I could probably ask all three of you this question but I'll ask Ms. Young.

Since we're looking at the economic security of women, could you pick one piece of legislation that you could perhaps see us improving and that would have the most impact on women's economic security?

● (1035)

Prof. Margot Young: It's easy to make a call for federal implementation and facilitation of universal child care. Quite simply, that would make a huge difference to the economic security of many women, particularly sole-parent families.

A lot of evidence shows that people have difficulty entering the paid labour force because of child care needs, the inaccessibility of child care, and the significant economic strain on households that the current child care situation presents, if you can get spots.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Does anyone else want to comment?

Dr. Tammy Schirle: It has always been very difficult trying to deal with federal-provincial relations in getting a universal child care program going. One thing I've suggested in the past is that instead of trying to create a federal universal system, it's perhaps better to think more about using those funds for something more targeted and having those targets on an individual basis rather than on a family-income basis, and in making sure that good subsidies are available for women who want to build careers but may not have the wage opportunities that would also cover child care costs. That is an alternative to consider in this context.

Ms. Pam Damoff: One of the issues with child care is that one size doesn't always fit all. If you're working in the trades or in policing, for example, where you have to work night shifts, it can be a real challenge for women to find child care and to be able to pursue those careers.

I'm going to turn it over to my colleague.

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): That's marvellous. Thank you very much.

Before I begin, I have to declare that I have a relationship with Dr. Lumpkin. In a previous life I used to work for the university sector and I had an opportunity to visit Mount Saint Vincent and to work with her closely. I always appreciated her leadership.

Dr. Lumpkin, Mr. Nesbitt, a witness on a previous panel, indicated how important it is to reach a certain threshold—a critical mass, he would say—for women to be involved in leadership positions on boards to improve the performance of the organization, as well as to achieve better performance all around.

And thank you for your opening comments. I note that one-third of the board of Universities Canada is composed of women university presidents, which is great. I'm assuming that's probably an average for other organizations of post-secondary institutions.

Can you offer some thoughts as to how universities themselves, which one would expect to be leaders in this field, move beyond that 20% level, which is not quite the critical mass?

I say this with all humility, because the House of Commons in Canada has only 27% female members and it was stuck in the low twenties up until this election, so we have no lessons to offer. I wonder if you have some reflections on that.

Ms. Ramona Lumpkin: Thank you for that question, Greg. We're working on exactly that.

For example, one of the things we're going to do is meet with search firms that guide universities in hiring for senior positions to see what we can learn from them about unconscious bias, about barriers that are affecting the hiring selections. I'm pleased to say that —

Mr. Greg Fergus: Male-designed playgrounds, as you put it.

Ms. Ramona Lumpkin: Male-designed playgrounds, exactly.

In fact, I'm really pleased to share with you that last fall, at our national Universities Canada meeting, we brought in someone to train us in unconscious bias. There were about 60 university presidents—obviously, many of them males—who took part in that training. It's humbling. You think, “Oh, I don't have bias,” but in fact when you dig, you realize there are very human tendencies to like what's familiar.

Many of us are taking the unconscious bias training back to our own campuses. I think those are certainly some important things to do.

Perhaps not in the university sector, but on the appointment of boards, I'm starting to lean towards the idea that perhaps we're ready for quotas. I know that I'm being provocative, but we've seen that the OSC's “comply or explain” policy has only moved the needle 1%.

The Prime Minister decided to appoint a cabinet that was 50-50. You can call it a quota, but they seem to be very well-qualified women to me.

When I met with Anita Vandenbeld, chair of the National Liberal Women’s Caucus, back in the fall, she pointed out that the women's caucus now has more ministers on it than any other Liberal caucus and that they're doing gender-based analysis almost naturally.

Sometimes you have to intervene, and I want to see what would happen with quotas.

● (1040)

Mr. Greg Fergus: Thank you for that.

Professor Schirle and Doctor Young, do you have some views on this matter, especially on the last point? Are we at the point where we should be thinking of quotas, or are we still in a “comply or explain” world?

Dr. Tammy Schirle: I don't think the “comply or explain” world seems to have any effect whatsoever. Quotas are difficult, but I think they might be necessary, if nothing else, in order to have very clear targets with some sense of auditing employers to try to keep up with that.

It's a difficult thing to work with, especially in the private sector. I think the biggest challenge is convincing the private sector to get on board with this.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Thank you.

Prof. Margot Young: I concur. I think the methods we're employing clearly aren't working, and it is time to think about quotas.

There are a variety of different ways to implement quotas. With a sensitive and structured sort of approach, we can do much better at getting the kind of outcomes that we at least say we're committed to.

The Chair: Excellent.

That's pretty much our time for today.

I want to thank all of our witnesses for coming, especially Ramona Lumpkin, whom I imposed on yesterday afternoon when she came to my office. I recognized her breadth of experience and said, “We simply have to have you on this panel.”

If you do think of something that you believe might be helpful to the committee as we go forward in our study, please feel free to send it to the clerk. I thank you again for the work you do to advance the economic status of women. Have a wonderful day.

Thanks to the committee.

The meeting is adjourned.