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**OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)**

**Tuesday, February 2, 2016**

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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**Opposition Motion – Pay Equity**

**Ms. Dianne Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to the motion put forward by my colleague from Nanaimo—Ladysmith. I want to be perfectly clear that the only acceptable position by any member in the House is equal pay for equal work, and every person, regardless of race, religion, or gender needs to know that when they enter the workforce they will receive equal compensation.

We, as the Conservative Party, have always supported that position. In fact, it was the Conservative government that introduced the Employment Equity Act in 1984. It was also the Conservative government that appointed the very first woman to cabinet. We also appointed the very first woman to the Senate and the very first female as Clerk of the Privy Council, whom I understand, unfortunately, has recently been removed.

I know that many of my female colleagues rose in the House last week and spoke on the 100th anniversary of Manitoba women being allowed the right to vote, and we will continue to celebrate that passion, that determination, and that inspiration. There are many women, including me, who have struggled in the workforce and had to work harder for less pay. It is incumbent upon all of us to right those wrongs. I would suggest that most of the women who sit in the House have gone through similar trials and tribulations throughout their career and can speak to those issues at great length.

We have come a very long way in spite of those wrongs. I am proud to say that during my time as the mayor of Surrey, we enjoyed a council that had a majority of women for many years. Being the first female mayor elected in that city, I had the good fortune to work with many women CEOs, business owners, public sector workers, or private sector employees. We have had those discussions around pay equity.

I believe that working with, supporting, and helping to empower the next generation of young women is something that we should all embrace. Several of my colleagues and I who are

speaking on this issue today are very passionate about this topic. Indeed, I would suggest that we are all very passionate about this topic. We firmly support the basic principles of equality and equal pay for equal work.

I want to speak to my colleague's proposed amendment that was not accepted and just go through the points in the motion. Point (a) of the motion reads:  
recognize that the government must take action to close the unacceptable gap in pay between men and women which contributes to income inequality and discriminates against women;

I absolutely agree that everything should be done to ensure that any gap in pay between men and women is rectified immediately. We heard from other members that in many different areas there is inequity. I would say that whether it is in the private or public sector, equal pay for equal work is essential for everyone.

Point (b) of the motion states that we should recognize pay equity as a right. Absolutely, it is a human right for all people. This point only reinforces my previous comments, and again, my colleagues and I fully agree with equal pay for equal work.

Point (c) is where we run into some difficulty. We heard from my colleague who put the amendment forward that this statement is factually incorrect. I do support my colleague, the member for Sarnia—Lambton, that we remove that point from the body of the motion. It is very unfortunate that the amendment was not supported, because its language is not factual and not supportable.

In fact, in 2009, the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act came into place. Again, this act reflects the issues that we are discussing here today. The act states that:

3 (1) An employer shall, in respect of its non-unionized employees, take measures to provide them with equitable compensation in accordance with this Act. In the case of unionized employees, the employer and the bargaining agent shall take measures to provide those employees with equitable compensation in accordance with this Act.

Those measures are in place. The act goes on to state:

4 (1) An equitable compensation assessment under this Act assesses, without gender bias, the value of work performed by employees in a job group or a job class and identifies, by taking into account the prescribed factors, whether an equitable compensation matter exists.

Therefore, those elements are in the act.

However, point (d) of the opposition motion states:

(d) appoint a special committee with the mandate to conduct hearings on the matter of pay equity and to propose a plan to adopt a proactive federal pay equity regime, both legislative and otherwise, and...

It then goes on to define the structure of that committee.

Again, as previously stated, the status of women committee has done extraordinary work. I know that it will continue to do extraordinary work, because this is an issue that crosses party lines, and it is a place where these issues can be addressed. They should be dealt with within the existing framework and the existing structure. If they cannot be addressed in that committee, and there are significant labour issues, then it should be referred to the Public Service Labour Relations Board.

We heard from the President of the Treasury Board that the government is undergoing a new direction and a new process. I am very curious to understand what that would look like. Again, as he stated, this is would not be partisan. It would include all of the comments that we have made here today.

I would stress again that this is an issue that affects all of us. I think of my two daughters who are just entering the workforce, and I think of my fellow women sitting in this chamber today. I think of all the women in the next generation who are relying on us to ensure that they are treated fairly, equitably, and with respect. I think of those brave women in Manitoba who struggled and took those important first steps 100 years ago to help us to get to where we are today. Therefore, we must address all of these issues and ensure equal pay for equal work.

I would like to thank the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith for bringing this motion forward. I would suggest that it is incumbent upon all of us to ensure that there is equality and equity among employers, in both the private and the public sector.

**Ms. Karina Gould (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.):**

Mr. Speaker, as my colleague mentioned previously, this is an issue that women have been fighting for decades and decades.

I had a meeting with my local chapter of the Canadian Federation of University Women recently in Burlington and they raised this issue. They have been working on it for 40 years.

I would ask my hon. colleague who so passionately supports pay equity: How can members of her party justify not supporting this motion today and go back to the individuals in their communities who have been working so doggedly for 40 or 50 years on an issue that we should not have to be dealing with in 2016?

**Ms. Dianne Watts:**

Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear. It is not that we do not support the motion. However, there are two points that we requested be amended because it is not factual information and there is work that is being undertaken. Those are the only two points that we have any issue with whatsoever.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):**

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. Unfortunately, instead of providing any clarification, her speech just causes more confusion.

On the one hand, I was very pleased to hear my colleague say that pay equity for women is a basic right. On the other hand, she defended the Conservative legislation from 2009 that makes pay equity an issue covered by collective bargaining rather than a human right. That legislation bans people from taking these matters to the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

Would the member agree that, since this is a basic right, people should be able to bring these matters to the Canadian Human Rights Commission?

**Ms. Dianne Watts:**

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that absolutely it is a human right. It is a human right for pay equity for any gender, any person who enters the workforce. I would suggest that this is a very important issue and that the entirety should be sent to the status of women committee, and those issues addressed through that process; and moved forward, implementing the measures that need to be implemented and enforcing what is already there.

**Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.):**

Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the remarks from the member for South Surrey—White Rock and I appreciate her expressions of commitment to the issues of women's equality.

A number of times in her remarks, she referred to a commitment to equal pay for equal work. I think that as a former mayor of a major city, she would be very aware that it is different from equal pay for work of equal value. In fact, equal pay for equal work leaves a huge gap which is the equitableness of pay for women who are doing work in jobs that are not identical to the jobs men are in but that have equal value.

I would like to know whether this is a deliberate omission of a commitment to equal pay for work of equal value, which is a far more comprehensive type of equality in pay for women. Was that a deliberate omission? Is the member expressing that her party is not committed to equal pay for work of equal value, or was this omission an accident?

**Ms. Dianne Watts:**

Mr. Speaker, I want to be crystal clear. Absolutely in no way whatsoever have I deliberately intended not to put in equal work for equal value. I think it is broad in nature; it is everything that we should be doing and should be continuing to do.