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• (1305)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Marc Garneau (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.)): I'd like to call this meeting to order.

Good afternoon, everyone.

[*Translation*]

Welcome to meeting number 10 of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

[*English*]

We acknowledge that we are on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe nation.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I'd like to outline a few rules.

First of all, members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice, or Inuktitut.

[*Translation*]

Keep in mind the Board of Internal Economy's guidelines for health protocols, which you are all very familiar with.

[*English*]

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name.

[*Translation*]

A reminder that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair.

[*English*]

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly, and when you're not speaking, please mute your microphone.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4) we are considering the main estimates today.

Joining us for the first hour is Minister Hajdu of Indigenous Services Canada, and her department officials.

In the second hour, we will hear from the Hon. Marc Miller, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations; the Hon. Dan Vandal, Minister of Northern Affairs; and their respective department officials.

Honourable Minister Hajdu, you have the floor for five minutes.

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Indigenous Services): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I can't say how happy I am to see you all in person. It's my first committee appearance not on Zoom in well over two and a half years, so it's great to see you in real life. I am looking forward to our conversation today.

I, too, am obviously on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin people. I come from the Robinson-Superior Treaty area from the traditional territory of the Fort William First Nation on the tip of Lake Superior, so I am blessed to live and play there.

I am here today to discuss supplementary estimates (C), 2021-22, and the main estimates for 2022-23 for Indigenous Services Canada.

Joining me are Deputy Minister Christiane Fox, and Philippe Thompson, chief financial officer.

This past week we observed International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, World Water Day and World Tuberculosis Day.

Each of these days serves as a stark reminder of the impacts of colonization, historic inequities, and trauma that have had and continue to have such a significant impact on first nations, Inuit and Métis communities across the country.

The work of decolonization and self-determination needs our steady and unwavering commitment, a clear focus with equity funding and opportunity, and a shared vision of a healthy future for everyone in this country.

The Prime Minister has been very clear that working toward reconciliation requires the commitment of all cabinet ministers, so together with my colleagues, first nations, Inuit and Métis partners, and the public service, we are working to change our processes to better support indigenous self-determination, and the well-being and economic prosperity of all indigenous peoples in Canada.

This commitment to a process of reconciliation will help bring justice, respect and dignity for indigenous peoples, but it's not just good for indigenous peoples, it's good for all of us as a country and for all Canadians.

Since 2016, we have invested over \$6.5 billion on infrastructure projects that include projects in housing, water, education and communities. The funding provided, through these supplementary and main estimates, is a movement toward reconciliation. I see these investments as a down payment on the work we have left to do.

The 2021-22 supplementary estimates (C) contain \$648.6 million in new funding that will be dedicated to emergency response and recovery activities; the continued implementation of Jordan's principle; indigenous trauma-informed health and cultural supports; and medical transport in Nunavut.

For 2022-23, the department's main estimates are \$39.6 billion. This is a net increase of about \$26.1 billion, or 193%, compared to last year's main estimates.

[Translation]

A look at the increased expenditures for this year shows that many of the items relate to child and family well-being. It is clear from these estimates that indigenous children and youth are at the heart of what we do. We remain committed to improving their health, education and well-being. That is an essential part of our journey towards reconciliation.

[English]

However, no amount of money can reverse the harms that first nations children have experienced, or return the years of lost love and family that were suffered through the separation from families, communities and culture. Historic injustices do require historic reparations. Our shared goal is to achieve a settlement that can be delivered to families as soon as possible.

The fall economic and fiscal update committed to providing \$40 billion to provide compensation for those harmed by the federal government's discriminatory funding practices and to commit the funds necessary to implement long-term reform so that future generations of first nations children will never face the same systemic tragedies.

This year's budgetary spending includes half of the funds to begin to address these historic wrongs. As mentioned, budgetary spending has increased by \$26.1 billion, or 193%, as compared to amounts in the 2021-2022 main estimates, as a result.

The major changes include an increase of \$20 billion for the agreements in principle that have been reached for compensation. These funds honour our commitment to provide compensation that's comprehensive, fair and equitable and that will help to provide some healing for those impacted by the historic inequities in first nations child welfare. We are working with all of the parties to put into place an approach that will best serve affected children and their families.

I do want to take a moment to thank all of the parties and the Honourable Murray Sinclair and his team for their incredible work and shared commitment to this process as they continue to work tirelessly on reaching a final agreement.

We've also committed to making significant investments to address long-term reform for first nations child and family services that will be sought in future supplementary estimates. There's an additional increase of \$646.8 million for first nations child and family services and the continued implementation of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal's orders. This funding supports the implementation of the act respecting first nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families, which ensures that first nations, Inuit and Métis children and families have jurisdiction over their child and

family services. Indeed, it follows the principle that first nations, Inuit and Métis people can decide what is best for their children, families and communities.

As I mentioned earlier, this week we marked World Water Day. I remain deeply committed to ensuring that first nations on reserve have access to safe and clean drinking water. This year's budgetary spending includes an increase of \$2 billion for an out-of-court settlement to again compensate first nations people for the discriminatory lack of clean water access. There's also a net increase of \$1.2 billion in this year's budgetary spending for infrastructure to make improvements in access to safe, clean drinking water on reserve. Communities have worked hard to improve water infrastructure by repairing, expanding and replacing infrastructure; strengthening training and support of water operators; and allocating additional funding for operations and maintenance. First nations communities and leaders have been clear—they need long-term support for water and waste-water operations and maintenance to prevent future advisories. That's why Canada is now covering 100% of the funding formula used to calculate these costs, up from 80%.

One challenge with lifting long-term drinking water advisories is that it's not just about repairing or replacing infrastructure. It is about running and maintaining the system after an advisory has been lifted.

• (1310)

The Chair: Minister, I'll ask you to wrap up.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Okay. I have so much more to say, but we'll get to it in questions.

The Chair: You will.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I'll just say that the increase in funding for water will support first nations to improve water operator salaries, retain qualified operators, train new operators, improve or maintain asset condition ratings and ensure longer life cycles for water assets.

We of course have an increase of spending in health care, education and infrastructure since we know that the deficits are large.

I will just repeat this and end here. First nations leaders and members do know best what their communities need. We are committed to supporting first nations to independently deliver services. We're working with communities to help them prepare for the transfer of service delivery and are taking a holistic, community-based approach.

Thank you very much, members of the committee. I'm looking forward to your questions. This is a very important conversation.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now move into our first round.

[English]

Mr. Schmale, you have six minutes.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

Good afternoon, colleagues. Unfortunately I can't join you in person, but I appreciate the opportunity to speak with the minister about the issues that she mentioned just a few seconds ago in her speech.

Minister, let's start with infrastructure, because you kind of ended on that tone.

I'd like to look at the estimates that are showing the amount of spending that is going towards maintenance of community infrastructure and construction, that sort of thing. Can you tell the committee specifically what percentage of those funds is going to new infrastructure, as opposed to maintenance of existing infrastructure?

• (1315)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you very much, MP Schmale.

I will just say it was disappointing to see your party vote against the estimates last night, because, in fact, this is what we need, we need to actually continue our investments in first nations' capacity.

I will turn to Philippe to speak a little bit about your question and the percentages.

Mr. Philippe Thompson (Chief Finances, Results and Delivery Officer, Department of Indigenous Services): We see an increase in the funding for infrastructure this fiscal year. It's up to \$1.2 billion. We have received funding through budget 2021. The difference between what makes the \$1.2 billion is we have a net increase of \$1.1 billion that makes for shovel-ready projects, but also operation and maintenance. There is a little reduction in water funding. That comes from the sunset of budget 2016.

With regard to the exact proportion, I know my colleague from regional operations is on the line as well. I don't know if we have that exact proportion of what is dedicated to new infrastructure versus the maintenance, the operation, of existing ones.

I'll turn to Joanne Wilkinson, and if we don't have the answer, we can always provide that detail in writing.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Right, thank you.

Be as quick as possible, please. I only have so much time.

Ms. Joanne Wilkinson (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Regional Operations, Department of Indigenous Services): Absolutely.

We will follow up in writing. I don't have the specific breakdown with us today.

Thank you.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: No problem. That's a very quick answer. Thank you.

In terms of boil water advisories, how many are existing at this exact moment on reserve?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: We've lifted 131 boil water advisories since we were elected in 2015. There are 34 left. There are a number that are very close to being lifted and we're very excited to be able to announce those in the months to come.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I'm just curious, out of those 131 that have been lifted—and this goes to my first question—how many have come back online as boil water advisories coming back?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: It's a good question. There are some short-term boil water advisories that do result in long term.

I'm not sure about the interplay between the new infrastructure and the new water treatment plants, but perhaps, Mr. Thompson, you have that answer.

Mr. Philippe Thompson: Of course, this is a fluid situation. There are always pressures on water systems. Again, I will turn to my colleague, Joanne, from regional operations if she has more information with regard to advisories.

Ms. Joanne Wilkinson: Certainly a part of the goal, in terms of reducing the number of long-term drinking water advisories, has been preventing those short-term advisories, those between two and 12 months, from becoming long term. In that space we've also ended 211 short-term drinking water advisories having been lifted.

In terms of the new construction, though, we'll include that in the breakdown we get to you from your first question.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Okay, thank you.

Minister, out of the boil water advisories that have been lifted—and I know you mentioned 131—your party did promise in the 2015 election to have them all lifted by 2019. What continue to be the roadblocks in getting them fixed? I'm sure everyone would agree at this table if this were any other municipality or any other place, this would be done already.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you.

Again, we inherited 131 from the Harper Conservatives. I'm not at all defending that there are 34 left, but I will just say that it's important we realize where we were starting from.

I will say that for the remaining 34, there are a number we think will be lifted shortly. There are some that are very challenging, to do with the complex interplay between the geography of the community, the kinds of underlying infrastructure to deliver that water to homes, and sometimes access to land that's appropriate to build those facilities.

Each boil water advisory is listed online on the Indigenous Services Canada web page, with a very detailed outline of where the community is at in terms of the process to lift those water advisories. I will say that communities are working incredibly hard with Indigenous Services Canada. It's not a lack of money. Sometimes there are barriers in place that require multiple steps prior to the infrastructure being installed and working efficiently.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Why did your party promise to end them by 2019 if you knew the problem was that big?

• (1320)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I think it was a commitment by the Prime Minister that everybody in this country deserves clean drinking water. And, of course, there are some—

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I think we all agree, but you promised.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: And we're going to honour that promise, sir. We are continuing to work on that.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: We're a couple of years late. Sorry, I'm getting a huge echo.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Imagine how further ahead we would have been had this work been ongoing over the decade the Conservative Party held power. I will just say this, we are committed to ending these long-term drinking water advisories. We work respectfully with communities. The money is in place. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has indicated the money is in place. We've closed the gap on operating and maintenance expenses. I have every confidence we will be able to work with our partners to get this done.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Well, Minister, think of how much further ahead we'd be if the party in power actually kept its promise.

On what date will all boil water advisories be lifted?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Again, we have a very clear outline for Canadians who are interested, and by the way, many Canadians are interested in this work with first nations communities. It is online at the Indigenous Services Canada website.

It's difficult to tell you an exact date, because communities have different barriers. They have different realities or different processes in the long-term list, but we are ambitious and we are working with our partners. As I said, I am pleased by the Parliamentary Budget Officer's assessment of our ongoing commitment financially, and we're working with communities on many of those other structural barriers that are in the way.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Minister, do you—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Schmale.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll go to the next person.

Mr. Powlowski, you have six minutes.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Thank you.

Good afternoon, Minister and staff.

I want to ask about post-secondary education funding for indigenous communities. I've been approached by Seven Generations, which is a post-secondary institution in Fort Frances. They've enquired as to whether more funding is available. They're certainly doing some really good and valuable work in northwestern Ontario, so perhaps somebody could tell me what, if any, funding opportunities there are for first nations or indigenous communities for post-secondary education.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you. I've spoken with that group of people who are so passionate about post-secondary education indeed unlocking generations of poverty, and I completely agree.

By coincidence, I'm a first-generation, post-secondary graduate myself and certainly have seen the impact that has had on my own children.

I'm going to turn to Deputy Fox, because she has been doing some good work in this area.

Ms. Christiane Fox (Deputy Minister, Department of Indigenous Services): In terms of indigenous-led post-secondary institutions, right now we tend to have a lot of our programming based on a program of the institution itself, whether it's an economic development, business or nursing program. I think what we're hearing from post-secondary institutions is the desire for that core funding. We are looking at how the department can better support...versus program by program, in order to give that long-term support.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Thank you very much.

Concerning the second question, Webequie and Marten Falls have asked for funding for a permanent road so those communities can access the rest of the world other than by flying or by ice roads.

I think the province has agreed to some funding. Where are we in terms of funding? That said, I realize that might not be your ministry. It might be other ministries.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: MP, you're absolutely right. There's a strong provincial lead in the space of provincial roadways. To my knowledge, the Province of Ontario has not indicated yet to our department that they need additional supports. They might be working with the Minister of Infrastructure. We'll check into that and get back to you, but the Province of Ontario would be largely the party responsible to support the development of those roads.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Thank you.

On the third question, I'm not sure if you were here.... No, it was before your time. During the last session, this committee had a study looking at the enforcement of various laws in indigenous communities, and certainly lack of enforcement seemed to be a big problem.

I was very pleased to read quite recently that we'd started a consultation process looking at first nations police services legislation. I think that is being led by Public Safety and Minister Mendicino, but perhaps you could tell me a little more as to what our aims are and when we expect that to be done.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: It is one of the issues that comes up when I visit communities and is a priority for communities that don't have any policing or enforcement, or have little policing or enforcement. However, even if communities do, there has been a historic clash—if I can say it strongly enough—between indigenous communities and, sometimes, police forces. You and I are from Thunder Bay and we're in the middle of such a clash that seems to have been ongoing for all the years I've been a politician and then some. That's why these consultations are exciting, because there have been pilot projects through Public Safety to support the development of self-determined policing for indigenous communities that are run by indigenous communities and provided to indigenous members, and they have shown great promise.

These consultations are about the co-development of policing legislation that would enable even more communities to take part in setting up their own policing programs in their communities, or sometimes it might be in larger geographical regions through tribal councils or other kinds of indigenous organizations.

I'm not sure I have the timeline for the completion of the consultations.

• (1325)

Ms. Christiane Fox: The consultations actually started last week. They will be ongoing until probably May or June. However, there is some funding available now for the expansion of some of the existing policing agreements.

In addition, Indigenous Services Canada has a complementary piece, which is the Pathways program. It is aimed to be a bit of that prevention spending around safe transportation, peacekeepers, to start developing capacity and talent base to then become part of that future indigenous-led policing force.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Are we actually contemplating having a national police force, something like the RCMP, which would be separate?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: No. It wouldn't be national in scope, because each indigenous community or region has a different reality, and in some cases different customary codes. The idea is to enable first nations communities or regions to have policing and safety programs that are specific to their own area and their own cultural realities, and use their own members.

For example, many communities talk about the need for—I don't even know the right term—public safety officers, people who are engaged with the community in a preventative way, prior to needing enforcement in the classic way that we might think about it.

Those kinds of ideas are, in some cases, very historical for first nations groups. It's about peacekeeping prior to having to enforce the law. They would be very specific to each community or region. That's how we're anticipating it would unfold.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Powlowski.

Go ahead, Mrs. Gill. You have six minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the minister and her entire team for being here today.

The minister said that first nations knew best what was right for them, and I agree with her.

In the course of our studies, the committee met with Chief Lance Haymond, from the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador. He spoke about the housing shortage, which is the number one priority of first nations in Quebec. First nations representatives from every province and territory told us the same thing, in fact. The chief said that first nations were ready, that they knew what their needs were, that they put a figure on the solutions and that they had the necessary strategies.

The department set a goal to eliminate the housing shortage by 2030. The \$3.9 billion it had allocated to first nations in Quebec over five years will not fill the housing gap. With the population explosion, the funding will not meet the needs. The government allocated the \$3.9 billion in 2018, but the situation has changed and the demand is even greater now.

My question is pretty straightforward. It's about the \$3.9 billion. Does any of that funding appear in the budget? What does the government have planned for short-term investments? The target is 2030. That was what the government promised, but it's clear that the problem won't be fixed by 2030. What does the government plan to do? What proportion of that funding is included in the budget? If you don't have the figures with you, you can get back to us.

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thanks for your passion for housing. I agree that it's a critical ingredient to anybody's success.

The stories I've heard—

• (1330)

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. McLeod.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Mr. Chairman, I have a hearing issue. There's a significant difference between the volume on the interpreter versus the minister's volume. I'm playing with this button on and off, and every time it switches, it's just about blowing what hearing I do have left out of my ears.

Is there any way we could get that balanced, so that I don't have to be switching back and forth?

The Chair: We'll pause for a second to see if we can answer your question.

• (1330)

(Pause)

• (1330)

The Chair: We'll resume. Thank you for your forbearance everyone.

I think you were in the middle of an answer, Minister.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I was just beginning and I remember the question.

[*Translation*]

It was about the unacceptable situation faced by indigenous peoples in Quebec.

[*English*]

It's true that there is a shortage of housing everywhere in this country. I do want to point out that MP Stubbs called it a "humanitarian" crisis the other day, and she's absolutely right. She's speaking about northern housing, but it's true all across this country.

In fact, our national housing strategy now has affirmed the right to housing as a Canadian right, so it's something that's very important to me personally.

I come from a family that's experienced substance use problems throughout many generations. Treatment centres are only as good as the desire of the person to go to them. We have to be thinking more broadly than treatment centres.

Of course, we need better access to treatment when people need it, but we also need the kinds of things that make people successful after they leave the treatment centre, which help solidify those gains they make and that recovery they experience while in treatment. If people go back to the exact same conditions and the exact same circumstances, relapses are all too often the result. It's heartbreaking for the person and it's heartbreaking for the family.

As much as everybody talks about treatment centres, I'm very excited about the prevention piece of our wellness and mental health strategy, so we can prevent people from needing that kind of intensive treatment in the first place.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Idlout.

We'll go to the second round now.

First is Mr. Vidal. You have five minutes.

• (1345)

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): I think it's Shannon's turn.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Thanks, Chair.

I'm going to ask a question, and then I'll go back to Jamie Schmale.

Minister, thanks for being here.

Thanks to your officials for joining you today.

I'm sure you know that Métis settlements in Alberta are unique in Canada. They are a land base, they pay taxes and they have elected councils. There are eight of them in total, and four of them are in Lakeland. We're all well aware that the 2016 Daniels decision confirmed that Métis people are a federal responsibility.

A 2018 infrastructure report highlighted the massive gap that exists between Métis settlements and the rest of rural Alberta, especially on infrastructure. They estimate that about 24% of roads, or 216 kilometres, are in very poor condition. The average cost to build a road in Alberta varies, but it's anywhere between \$500,000 to \$1 million a kilometre. For context, for the entire immediate infrastructure needs of Métis settlements, in which the government also included housing, you promised \$40 million over four years. That would be \$1.25 million or 2.5 kilometres per community per year, and that's only if it's used for roads and not housing or water treatment lagoons, plants or any other facilities.

I am a fiscal Conservative. I believe in governments putting needs before wants and making careful spending choices, exactly so core needs like infrastructure and housing can be met.

I wonder how much has been given to the Buffalo Lake, East Prairie, Elizabeth, Fishing Lake, Gift Lake, Kikino, Paddle Prairie and Peavine Métis settlements in Alberta.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you for the question, and thank you for the passion behind it.

I hope you speak to your Albertan colleagues about the importance of creating infrastructure like roads, as well. As I said in my answer to MP Powlowski, provincial roads are the responsibility of the province; nonetheless, they can prioritize them and get support from the federal government through the infrastructure projects. It is important that we consider connecting those remote communities, because they oftentimes have a better ability to participate in the economy and to drive their own local economies.

In terms of funding for housing in Métis settlements, I would encourage you to ask that question of Minister Miller. My department focuses only on infrastructure spending in first nations reserves.

The last thing I'll say is when we're talking about Métis people having been determined to have rights under section 35 as indigenous people, through a number of different court decisions, in my mind, it's important not to say that the federal government is responsible for them. I'll tell you why. All too often, I see the football of who's responsible for indigenous people, and I will say that we're all collectively responsible to honour the treaties and the agreements—

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: I'm a person of Ojibwa descent. I appreciate your comment.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: I certainly don't doubt anyone's sincerity on this file. I wanted to alert you that those Métis settlements in Alberta have not received a dime and they're about to miss the second construction season on the \$40-million commitment for infrastructure and housing.

Thanks, Minister.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you very much.

I'll make sure to connect with my colleague Minister Miller about that and infrastructure.

The Chair: Mr. Schmale, you have about a minute and a half.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Thank you very much, Chair.

Minister, I want to continue on a path similar to Mrs. Stubbs'. You mentioned in your opening remarks the increased funding that your department is looking at, specifically in regard to \$22 billion for out-of-court settlements. Maybe you could update this committee on the comments we've heard from some indigenous leaders who've been waiting for about six years or more for compensation.

Where is your department in issuing the \$40,000 compensation payments? How far along are you and your department in implementing the new system that will protect indigenous children?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Cindy Blackstock began her litigation through the CHRT in 2007. That's a long time ago. I'm really proud to be part of a government that has looked for ways to get out of court and to do the right thing by indigenous people, including settling long-standing claims and looking for new pathways that will result in fewer litigated solutions.

We were really thrilled to get to an agreement in principle at the end of 2021. The parties are at the table right now working very collaboratively on how to ensure that the money is dispensed to claimants in a way that's fair and transparent, but also in a way that's safe and respects that people's process to get that money does not in any way revictimize or retraumatize them.

As a government, we have been learning from and watching other individual experience payments. We know that the way this unfolds will be critically important to people's mental health—

● (1350)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Minister, I'm sorry to cut you off. I have less than a minute.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Schmale. We ran out of time there. I'm sorry about that.

Ms. Atwin, you're up for five minutes.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm speaking to you all from the unceded Wolastoqiyik territory here in New Brunswick. Hello to all of the committee members.

Thank you, Minister, for being with us today. You're doing a fantastic job, if I can say that right off the bat.

Here in Fredericton, there is a fast-growing off-reserve and urban indigenous population. Friendship centres play a critical role in supporting this growing community across the country. I was so grateful to have you visit my riding over the break and to have the opportunity to showcase the incredible work of Under One Sky, the only friendship centre in New Brunswick, run by the amazing Patsy McKinney. I have also had the pleasure of regularly meeting with the National Association of Friendship Centres CEO, Jocelyn Formsma.

Minister, I'm wondering if you could comment on the importance of friendship centres and how our government is supporting their critical work moving forward.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you very much, MP Atwin. It was such a delight to be in Atlantic Canada. I have to say that one of the silver linings of being this minister is getting to meet with indigenous people from across the country and learning about new cultures like the Wolastoqiyik and the Mi'kmaq. It's just been a wonderful opportunity for me as a Canadian to understand the many different communities and the differences between culture and language across the country.

I was delighted to meet with you and the indigenous friendship centre in your community in Fredericton. Patsy and her team were incredibly welcoming. The work they've already done to help urban indigenous people find their paths and either choose to stay in an urban setting or find their way back to community, learn culture and language as appropriate, and provide child care—this is the

kind of work that we're really fostering across the country. We have a program that does provide funding to indigenous friendship centres and does provide supports for programs that are run through indigenous friendship centres. Although our program is largely for people on reserve, we know that there's a fluid movement of people between urban centres for school, services, work, and then back to first nations.

We're going to continue to work with indigenous friendship centres and support their success. We think it's an important component to indigenous people all across the country.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Excellent. Thank you so much.

I want to echo what MP Idlout mentioned in terms of senior care. It's something really important that we also discussed while you were here.

You were kind of cut off in your opening remarks, and I know that you mentioned a little bit about the anti-racism strategy. I'd particularly like to point to the implementation of Joyce's principle. I'm wondering if there are any updates or momentum you could point to and share with the committee and whether the anti-racism strategy is perhaps impacting service delivery in the health care field for indigenous peoples across the country.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you very much. I was the Minister of Health when we had the multiple health summits on racism in health care. I had an opportunity to listen to Ms. Echaquan's husband. Nobody should have to bear witness to a loved one getting treated like that in a health care centre, and it happens all too frequently.

As you know, we have plans to create co-developed health legislation with first nations people so that there is, again, a space where we can ensure that there are tools for first nations communities that want to, through the spirit of self-determination, provide health care services in culturally appropriate ways and ways that are closer to community. There are examples of that in B.C., of course, through the First Nations Health Authority, that have been really successful.

In terms of racism in general, when I was at the FSIN in Saskatchewan, I was happy to announce the funding of a position for a health ombudsman who would be able to receive complaints from first nations people in a safe and culturally appropriate way so that people can have confidence that they don't have to experience this kind of racism in their lives without a safe recourse under which they can take action.

Those are all just some of the responses that we have under way. I do think that some things don't seem as obvious that are maybe connected to racism—for example, working on economic development and ensuring that communities, like the many I visited on the east coast, have the opportunity to create their own source of revenue and contribute to their own communities and integrate with community members in a way that maybe looks different than it did even 10 years ago.

The guiding principles for our work in the north and the Arctic are in the co-developed Arctic and northern policy framework. Last December I met with indigenous, territorial and provincial governments for the second framework leadership meeting to advance implementation of the framework and governance structure. We are seeking \$98.3 million for the northern and Arctic governance partnership, \$5.9 million for the strategic and science policy program, and \$19.5 million for the northern regulatory and legislative framework.

• (1410)

[Translation]

All Canadians, regardless of where they live, deserve access to affordable and nutritious food. Northern Affairs Canada is working closely with other federal departments and indigenous partners to find common solutions to improve food security in the north. A long-term strategy requires a whole-of-government approach that addresses key income and employment factors.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of the committee on this issue, and look forward to continued collaboration.

[English]

We are therefore requesting \$121.7 million for this program.

Nutrition north Canada has seen a number of improvements, including the addition of several communities to the program and the very successful harvester support grant providing funds directly to indigenous partners for costs associated with traditional hunting and harvesting activities, increasing access to traditional country foods.

Thank you very much, and I'd be very pleased to take your questions.

Qujannamiik, marsi, merci and thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Vandal.

Minister Miller, you have the floor for five minutes.

[English]

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations): Thank you, Chair.

Hello, *bonjour, kwe, unnusakkut*.

I want to begin by acknowledging, as Dan did, that we're together here on the Algonquin Anishinabe people's territory, as we are here appearing in Ottawa.

I'm at the INAN committee today to explain the 2021-22 supplementary estimates and the 2022-23 main estimates for Crown-Indigenous Relations Canada. Joining me, mostly virtually, are Daniel Quan-Watson, Darlene Bess, Martin Reiher and Mary-Luisa Kapelus.

As we look to close out 2021-22, these supplementary estimates reflect a net increase of \$317.9 million, which includes \$186.6 million in new funding.

The new funding will allow us to deliver on key departmental priorities and indigenous priorities. For example, essential to supporting reconciliation at a fundamental level is \$42.2 million in funding for the continued implementation of the residential schools missing children community support funding.

I'd hasten to say at the same time that it is only a small snapshot of what has been promised and indeed funded to communities across the country to this date. I'd be glad to speak to it in more detail should the questions arise. The initiative is key to addressing the ongoing legacy of colonialism and impacts on the residential school system in particular. It supports survivors, families and communities as they continue to look for their children who never returned home and also provide support so that they may commemorate, mourn and heal in the way they choose.

In addition to the supplementary estimates, there is also an inclusive amount of \$51.1 million for the Métis nation housing strategy. As you are aware from the ongoing study, safe, adequate and affordable housing provides the foundation for individual families to achieve better health outcomes and socio-economic outcomes.

[Translation]

As we look ahead to the new fiscal year of 2022-2023, the main estimates will amount to approximately \$5.8 billion. This reflects a net increase of \$1.1 billion over last year.

We continue to work with Aboriginal partners to fully implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's calls to action. Part of this work includes the national plan to end the national tragedy of missing and murdered indigenous women, girls and 2ELGBTQIA+ people. These measures are supported by \$108.8 million in the department's estimates. These investments will support new shelters, among other things, and increase the capacity of indigenous women's organizations to provide services and support new models of community safety.

Finally, I want to say a few words about land claims in particular. The amount identified for specific claims settlements is just over \$2.3 billion in the estimates. The settlement of land claims, additions to reserves, and treaty settlement agreements are essential to rebuilding trust with indigenous communities, to righting wrongs, to ensuring justice, and so on. We cannot build trust, we cannot talk about self-determination, and we cannot move forward on reconciliation without addressing the issue of land, because land issues are one of the main causes of socio-economic inequality among first nations, Inuit and Métis.

• (1415)

[English]

To say that at some points we are throwing money at the problem is often misunderstanding that monetary compensation plays an essential role in restorative and reparatory justice and allows us to move on, on an equal-to-equal basis. There are many other instruments that I'd be eager to talk to you about at the committee, but as we apprehend what may seem in appearance to be large sums are often sums that have come due for over sometimes decades, and indeed centuries.

I appreciate the opportunity to explain the department's spending forecast today, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Meegwetch, qujannamiik, marsi, thank you, merci.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. We'll proceed with the first round of questions.

Mr. Vidal, you have six minutes.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ministers, for being here today.

Minister Miller, 16 of the 20 first nations along the route of the Coastal GasLink pipeline have signed agreements to acquire a 10% equity stake in the project. These communities also have other business partnerships including project supply chain contracts, mutual benefit agreements, etc. This obviously allows them to invest in thriving communities through investments in culture, sports, health and education programs as well as infrastructure. What we're talking about here is an opportunity of a lifetime for long-term, generational economic prosperity, but the equity options can only be executed once the pipeline actually is in service. We've seen extremely violent protests. We've seen rhetoric both on the ground and online by celebrities, by foreign-funded extremists.

I don't see any mention of any of this in the estimates, the department plans, the results. I don't see any discussion around this anywhere. I'm just curious to know what the government is doing to ensure this project gets built so that these first nations can receive the benefits they rightly deserve from this project.

Hon. Marc Miller: Violence of any nature is unacceptable in a society such as ours. At the same time we have to recognize that while this is an entirely provincially regulated authorization process that has gone through all the mechanisms, there is a resistance to this project by several indigenous groups. Those who have chosen to invest in CGL, that is absolutely their right, and indeed, on completion they most likely stand to benefit from it.

The question, I think, is this: What is the role of the federal government when people are not of the same mind, excluding, obviously, people who would choose violence as a solution to their frustrations? That is an important one. I don't think we could come up with a cost estimate that would truly value the role that the federal government can play working with the provincial government, in this case, Minister Rankin in B.C., in trying to achieve a peaceful solution to a very highly contentious situation that starts not only in resource extraction, but controversy over the issue of indigenous ti-

tle and Wet'suwet'en hereditary title that was embodied in Supreme Court cases a quarter of a century ago.

I'm not suggesting, by any stretch of the imagination, that hereditary leadership in this case sanctions any of the unacceptable activities we've seen, but we have to, at the same time, acknowledge that there is tension within the Wet'suwet'en people's leadership—many of them—as to whether this pipeline has had the social acceptability it has had. It is a difficult situation but I think—

Mr. Gary Vidal: Sorry, Minister, I don't mean to cut you off, but I—

Hon. Marc Miller: I'll just conclude in saying that the federal government stands ready to help in any situation to try to bring this to a peaceful solution. Trying to take sides isn't helpful, but trying to resolve this in a peaceful way is.

Mr. Gary Vidal: I want to go down a bit of a similar line.

In 2018 your government purchased the Trans Mountain pipeline. It was indicated at the time that you would not be a long-term owner.

Following the purchase, Finance Canada began consulting with first nations leaders about the possible indigenous ownership and since then it's been pretty quiet, I must say. We've seen some emails recently through access to information requests commenting on the “what we heard” report that was published by the government back in 2019, showing communications staff actually talking about keeping it quiet. That's a little bit discouraging, to be honest with you.

I want to get right to the crux so you have time to answer the question.

Can you tell me what the plan is in the context of selling TMX to the interested indigenous...? There were a couple of different groups interested in buying this pipeline. Where are we at in that journey with those groups?

• (1420)

Hon. Marc Miller: As the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, I don't have a direct role in any sort of brokering of this process. I do have the same information as to the interest of several indigenous groups that have expressed the desire to get an equity portion in it. I don't think, short of that.... I would obviously just direct you to the Minister of Natural Resources in that case for those types of questions. I have no particular point of view as to their role in this, and just support any indigenous peoples who I have the honour to represent and their points of view.

Thank you.

Mr. Gary Vidal: All right, thank you.

I know we're not supposed to be talking about supplementary estimates (B) from 2021-22 today, but I want to jump back because we didn't have the opportunity to talk about those and I want to ask you a quick question.

There was \$212.2 million to compensate 13,500 individuals. It was the day-school survivor settlement and you and I have talked about this in the past.

In the supplementary estimates (B) details it talks about this funding also being used for legal fees, third party administration costs and ongoing management of indigenous childhood claims litigation. I'm just wondering if you could provide to me the breakdown of how much of that \$212 million is for the legal fees and the administrative costs and all of that. If you or your people don't have it, could you provide that to us in writing at some point?

Hon. Marc Miller: Yes, we will provide that to you in writing. I don't have that today.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Thank you.

I have 30 seconds and I'm going to ask you a couple of really quick hitters here if I can.

I had the opportunity to meet with a number of your department officials a while ago and they gave me a briefing. That was fantastic and I appreciate that.

In that discussion, and along with some other information that we've been able to talk about after that, I learned there are some really long time frames on the settlement of the ATRs and the specific land claims. The time frames are actually almost unfathomable at times. I'm curious what you think is an appropriate standard and if there are some specific measures you could talk about that your department is working on to shorten those claim periods and settlements.

Hon. Marc Miller: Yes, they are complex. The timelines are unacceptable at times, even in the simpler cases. The approach I've tried to take as a minister is "as quickly as possible", with the frustrating realization that it can't come to fruition in a lot of cases.

In the ATR process there are some third party interests that we need to clear and satisfy before that process is complete.

The process of ATR is complicated even further by the fact that it falls within Minister Hajdu's and my authority jointly, but at the end of the day the conclusion is that it has been too slow and it needs to go more quickly, and we need to be a little more innovative as to how we add land back to reserves. It's very frustrating for communities, even if it's a couple of acres in some cases, but even in the simplest of cases it should be much faster.

There are more monies allocated internally—a few million dollars—to hasten that, but as we exit from COVID and as people actually go back to work and the in-person paper documentation that was essential to getting this done faster can be done a little more effectively, I hope to see that go more quickly.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vidal.

Mr. Weiler, you have six minutes.

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ministers Miller and Vandal, and officials for joining our committee for estimates today.

My first question, through you, Mr. Chair, is for Minister Miller.

The main estimates for the upcoming fiscal year include \$1.2 billion in funding to implement comprehensive land claims, self-gov-

ernment agreements and other agreements to address section 35 rights.

How does this funding relate to your commitment to give land back, which you stated when you were first appointed as a Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations?

Hon. Marc Miller: In part, Patrick, it ties directly into that comment.

I think the comment I made is one that is important for someone in my position and in the positions that we all hold to realize: the reality of our history, which is that our relationship is based in land and has been broken by, at times, the theft of land and the dispossession of land through other means, and the injustice that created. In the corresponding legal remedies that are being exercised today in court, more often than not the facts are not in Canada's favour, and that has resulted in very large monetary compensations.

The amounts you see in the estimates are ones that are coming to fruition. Out of respect for the communities in question, one of which is in Alberta, there are a few very large ones on the horizon, thanks to the engagement of the community foremost in getting it done. Often, there are situations where land cannot be restored because there are people on it, and despite what you've often heard about things, there is a desire by indigenous communities and non-indigenous communities to get along, and there are some very good partnerships. No one is asking anyone to go anywhere. People are just asking to get along and to achieve justice. That includes restoration of land and, where that is not possible, monetary funds to the extent that it can substitute for that adequately.

As I look to my department for more innovative solutions, including direct negotiations with provinces for better access to lands on a treaty land entitlement basis, mostly in the prairies, this is work that needs to continue, but to the extent that we can't replace with land or where that's not desirable, it's compensation, as I mentioned in my introductory comments, through monetary reparations and restorative justice.

• (1425)

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you.

Continuing on this line, many first nations across B.C. have completely given up on the modern treaty process just because of the astronomical cost in legal fees and the many decades that it has been taking to come to resolutions. Ironically, it has actually made pathways through the court much more attractive. At the same time, we've seen the provincial government in B.C. move relatively swiftly to conclude comprehensive foundation agreements with several first nations, including one in my riding.

The departmental plan says that it will “accelerate the renewal of the relationship with Indigenous peoples” by increasing “the number of treaties, self-government agreements and other constructive arrangements using an approach based on [the] affirmation of rights and by reform [of] policies to ensure they align with partner expectations”.

There is a combined almost \$450 million in these estimates in support of treaty negotiations both past and present, so I was hoping that you could explain to this committee at this point if the ministry is faced with a lack of resources for these negotiations and/or what the ministry plans to do to speed up some of the relatively glacial pace of the self-government negotiations and other constructive arrangements with first nations.

Hon. Marc Miller: It's an excellent question. I think it calls into question some of the principles we've stated quite clearly as a government about renewing our relationship and working on a nation-to-nation basis, going at the pace of the communities, and the sort of square approach that we have at times been accused—rightly so—of taking with respect to communities that want a little rounder solution.

Ironically even more so to your comments, Patrick, where we've had successes more often than not has been in the west, with a few notable exceptions where I come from. The pace is slow. I don't think we can deny that. There is a multi-governmental approach that needs to be taken when we talk about fisheries or defence or natural resources and provincial government involvement. These are all elements that do slow down the pace, but clearly the resources that we've allocated in the last five years have been significant. We have hundreds of negotiation tables of various natures, whether they're sectoral or not.

The modern treaty process is a slow process, but I think we have to realize as a country that what we have as a set of tools needs to be expanded for communities that just refuse, as a starter, to get into those discussions. It forces those communities into the devil they know, which is the Indian Act, and that is an absolutely unacceptable proposition to hear in this day and age.

Internally, in reflecting on it, we have to get smarter about what we're doing. There are some great.... I think about the Sechelt thing in your riding, Patrick, and there is some good news on the horizon there, hopefully. Obviously, the pace isn't at the pace that we would hold ourselves to and, indeed, that the communities and nations expect us to move at. You get into numbered treaty areas in the prairies, and you get into peace and friendship treaties in my neck of the woods and the relationship gets much more complex.

There's a lot of work to do, and it's stuff that we have to be open-eyed about, but clearly, the resources that we are now deploying, particularly in coming off two years of pandemic, are such that we feel we can make some significant progress. I think people are expecting more results, quicker, and I don't object to that point.

• (1430)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Miller.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Gill, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank both Minister Miller and Minister Vandal for their appearance today, as well as all the teams participating via telepresence.

First of all, I have a question on supplementary estimates (C). In the line entitled "Contributions for the purpose of consultation and policy development", the amount in the forecast column is usually very large, and then a sum is added as a supplement. In this case, it starts at \$12 million and then \$95 million is added, for a total of \$108 million.

What explains this very obvious change in the supplementary estimates?

Hon. Marc Miller: Thank you, Mrs. Gill.

To give you a more complete answer, I'll turn it over to the department officials who are online.

Mr. Daniel Quan-Watson (Deputy Minister, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm looking for the line and the number in question, and I'm hoping that the Chief Finances, Results and Delivery Officer, Ms. Bess, can help me.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Is it my turn, Mr. Chair? If not, I can ask another question while waiting for the witnesses' answer.

I would like to move on to a completely different subject, that of residential schools.

Of course, the issue concerns us all. All first nations know that research is underway, given the release of some archival documents, but time is running out.

Minister Miller, I remember hearing you say last December that you wanted to see a new structure, perhaps an interdepartmental committee, put in place to deal with the release of archival documents.

I would like to know how this desire is reflected in the estimates.

What has been done since December 2021?

Hon. Marc Miller: That's an excellent question.

There has been a lot of unease about the disclosure of information related to residential schools.

There are several categories of information, and I don't have enough time to talk about them in detail, but they are important distinctions. It is clear that Canada has not fully lived up to its moral duty to residential school survivors and their families in terms of disclosure.

Upon taking office and following the Prime Minister's directive, I conducted a review with my team to determine which documents, including those that were subject to confidentiality obligations by several religious institutions and related to certain residential schools in western Canada, should be released.

The Chair: No. We were at the time limit, Ms. Idlout.

Perhaps Mr. Vandal can answer that in the second round.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Sure.

The Chair: We'll start with Mr. Shields. You have five minutes.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Thank you. I'll be sharing my time with Mr. Vidal.

Mr. Miller, you're very familiar with Siksika Nation. They have a very long single road bridge over the Bow River, which is dangerous and an impediment to economic development.

Chief Ouray Crowfoot is working with the surrounding municipalities. They're working with the province but, as you know, this kind of build would take financial money from infrastructure.

If I bring that information to the Minister of Infrastructure federally, would you support that with influence at the table for that project?

• (1445)

Hon. Marc Miller: I have a pretty decent relationship with Chief Crowfoot. I have actually yet to talk to him specifically about that issue. Should he advocate that I do so, I'd gladly do so and advocate to the Minister of Infrastructure for that investment.

These projects, depending, have to be advanced by the province, and if they have an indigenous component there's actually a ratcheting up of the federal involvement, as you know, and sometimes they come from other sources, but I have no problem with advocating.

Mr. Martin Shields: This project is large enough that it will come to the federal side, for infrastructure.

Hon. Marc Miller: I understand that, when it gets large, it gets federal, yes.

Mr. Martin Shields: Right. I appreciate your support, and I will bring you that information as well.

I will turn my time over to Mr. Vidal.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Thank you.

Minister Miller, the PBO, in his report on the fall economic update, had some pretty scathing statements to make about the timeliness and lack of transparency on the release of the public accounts and the annual financial report. It is my understanding that the reopening and some of the stuff that happened around that from... I'm sorry; I'm trying not to get into too much accounting lingo here on you. That happened around the \$40-billion settlement that was going on at the time, and that's what triggered a lot of this, so I get the connection.

Can you tell the committee what it was about the agreements and the timing that forced you to, in an unprecedented way, reopen public accounts that were already signed off on? They were done; they were finished. They eventually got tabled later than they had since 1994, and, as I said, they had to be reopened.

Ultimately, just about \$10 billion got backdated into the accounts for 2021, and the PBO makes it very clear that this was a govern-

ment decision. In his report, he said, "...the Government's decision to amend the initial Public Accounts...."

As somebody who sits at the cabinet table, can you tell us how that played out and what forced you to have to do that?

Hon. Marc Miller: I never had any discussion of the sort, so I'd have to defer to whoever took that decision. I don't know.

Are you suggesting that the PBO said that it had to do with the agreements in principle that were completed on December 31?

Mr. Gary Vidal: Yes, it did. If you follow through the notes to the financial statements and the subsequent notes, it was directly connected to that—

Hon. Marc Miller: I'll confess to the committee that I haven't read it, but—

Mr. Gary Vidal: In essence, what it looks like, Minister, and that's the frustration.... It looks like, in essence, what happened is that these accounts got opened so that we could take \$10 billion of the \$40 billion and put it back in last year when there was already a \$327-billion deficit and not have to account for it going forward. That's the appearance of it.

Hon. Marc Miller: Yes, I know.

Mr. Gary Vidal: It might be legal, but sometimes we're putting our toes on the edge of.... It doesn't seem transparent in my mind. I guess that's my concern.

Hon. Marc Miller: When we look at indigenous liability and we look to account fairly, there are many large items that I would like to track back fiscally to the 1800s, and, in this case, track them back to 1990. We're talking about \$40 billion, \$20 billion in making sure we don't continue the discrimination that has heretofore occurred and \$20 billion to settle a liability that's gone, in various areas, back to the 1990s, so if I could attribute it to a prior governments, I would love to do it. I know that is not a proper accounting mechanism, but it's probably a fair one to do if you look at it from—

Mr. Gary Vidal: Minister, I'm not talking about the amounts; I'm talking about the process.

Hon. Marc Miller: I wouldn't know. I wasn't involved—

• (1450)

Mr. Gary Vidal: It was an unprecedented process.

I have one quick follow-up question, because I am going to run out of time, I'm sure, pretty quickly here, Mr. Chair.

Minister, you talked about the whole \$40 billion child welfare settlement. It was in two pieces, two \$20-billion pieces. You and I have had this conversation. In essence, what's happened, if I understand it correctly, is that the departments have tasked the AFN with going out and collecting the data to try to get these agreements in principle to a finalized point by March 31, 2022. That's what the aim was. I'm hearing some concerns that first nations that are not part of the AFN are upset about the process because they feel like they're being excluded.

The minister earlier in the first session talked about fairly and collaboratively working toward this.

Are you hearing that same concern, or is that just something I'm hearing through other sources? I'm just curious if you're hearing that same issue and how you're addressing it, if you are.

Hon. Marc Miller: Ultimately, it won't be me who addresses it; it will be the court.

We're talking about two separate items. One is historical compensation, which is largely driven through, while imperfect, a well-acknowledged process to redress agreements that are in class action, but when we're talking about long-term reform—

Mr. Gary Vidal: My point, Minister, is about the process and engaging first nations. You set out to engage first nations to come to an agreement by March 31. I'm not arguing about the components; I'm talking about the process. Has there been concern about the process from non-AFN member first nations?

Hon. Marc Miller: I think you'll always find concern with the process, and you will find concern with the process from people who don't consider AFN to speak for them.

When it comes to children and their families, it can be a very sensitive issue. You compound that by the fact that you're talking about historical amounts that, yes, while they're an attempt to take away the discrimination that's occurred...we're talking about large amounts that will impact communities and impact individuals. I'm confident that the process is equitable, but certainly those concerns are there.

I have a lot of faith in the advocacy of Dr. Blackstock. She has not been afraid to speak up for children, regardless of who that impacts, any level of leadership, foremost the federal government, but it is a concern, obviously, and I'm sure it's a concern for AFN.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vidal.

Mr. McLeod, you have five minutes.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to both ministers for presenting today. There's a lot of interesting discussion happening.

I want to make, first, a comment to Minister Vandal about nutrition north.

In the Northwest Territories I think we have 10 communities on the nutrition north program. We don't want to be on that program, but in order for us to get off the nutrition north program we need a solution. The solution is in the government's hands, because in the Northwest Territories the federal government is still responsible for building new roads. So, if you took the opportunity and found the investment to build roads to these communities, we wouldn't need the growing subsidy.

When I got involved in the government many years ago the program was only about \$20 million. We're well over \$100 million a year now. That's a suggestion, and I keep reminding you of it.

Minister Miller, I belong to the Dehcho First Nations, and I started attending meetings when I was 17 years old. I was talking about recreation facilities and sports programs. The elders were talking about land claims. I'm now 62 years old, and we're still talking

about land claims and self-government for the people of my tribal council. Things were not moving very fast, and in 2014 it got even worse because the Conservative government cut funding to band councils, to core funding, to tribal councils and they also cut the resources to the department.

Just before COVID hit I talked to a small community that's negotiating in the Northwest Territories—Colville Lake. We have 14 tables going on in the Northwest Territories. The chief said that in the Northwest Territories when negotiators come, they leave Ottawa Monday morning and fly all day to get to Yellowknife. After 12 hours they stay overnight in Yellowknife. The next day they catch the commercial flight to Norman Wells, and they stay there for another night. Wednesday morning they charter a plane into Colville Lake, get settled into their rooms, and we start negotiations on Wednesday afternoon. We do introductions and set the agenda. Thursday morning we start negotiating, and at noon we start packing up so that the negotiators can head back to Ottawa. They fly to Yellowknife Thursday night and Friday they head all the way back to Ottawa. A half of a day once a month, and it's not improving.

At this rate we're not going to settle any land claims. I've been here six and a half years and we haven't signed one land claim in the Northwest Territories. It's not the indigenous government's fault; it's the federal government's fault. They don't have the investment and resources to do a good job. There are negotiators with more files than they can handle.

Can you suggest a solution? Is there a strategy that you're working on to try to improve the ability for the federal government to take part in the negotiations to speed them up? At this rate—I'm 62 now—I'm not going to see an AIP in my lifetime in the part of the country that I live in.

Hon. Marc Miller: It's probably cold comfort for you to hear that we can reproduce that same negotiation strategy, and only travel half an hour. I understand that you're trying to exemplify the immense costs and resources that you deploy in actually getting people from A to B in the Far North, and the impacts. It would appear to be disrespectful to just sit there for a half hour, a half day, and it's an in-and-out strategy.

I don't like making this a partisan thing. It doesn't make me blind to the cuts that occurred in the past, but when we talk about reconciliation, there's still a segment of our society that wants it, but thinks it has to be done for free. When people look at the amounts we're investing into things—whether we're talking about just over \$1 billion in loans that had to be forgiven or were removed from the books for indigenous communities that had to fight in court for their legitimate claims—we've been able to move that stuff to clear the playing field, so we're starting on an equal basis.

I know it's frustrating to hear that these things are slow, and nothing's going to happen. I still have hope. I would have to fire myself if I said I didn't have hope. The reality is that we spend a lot of time co-developing fiscal policies that will make a huge difference in levelling the playing field, allowing communities to lift themselves up in the spirit of self-determination. There are many tools that are allowing us to work with communities, supporting them in their self-governance efforts as they work toward a nation to nation basis, which has to be an equal to equal basis.

We know the conditions on which we imposed indigenous communities to sign treaties, for example, to sign agreements in the past. That's why we call the ones that we feel are more progressive "modern treaties", because they're more egalitarian and fair in nature. There's work to do with them as well.

The pace of things is well registered within this government. We've been around for six years, with 19 self-government agreements, and there are more to come.

Land is a proposition. You would say that in the Far North, where there's so much of it, it should be a no-brainer. It still gets complicated, but—

• (1455)

The Chair: Minister, your answer is important, but we do have to wrap up.

Hon. Marc Miller: I don't disagree with MP McLeod. As you know, we've deployed a tremendous amount of money to get there. There are some breakthroughs coming in the north. I hope to see them in the next year or two, fiscally.

I don't like making promises I can't keep. You do know that, because I brief you often, and we're making the effort.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McLeod.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Gill, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to ask another question regarding the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Bill C-15 was passed last year, and I'm glad for first nations and all indigenous peoples.

In supplementary estimates (C), an additional \$11 million is allocated to support the implementation of the Declaration. These are not operating expenditures. I'd like to know what this \$11 million in additional funding is exactly and how it moves us closer to actually implementing Bill C-15 at this time.

Hon. Marc Miller: The royal assent of this bill was a crucial moment for indigenous peoples and its implementation is even more important. It is an immensely complex challenge, because we are talking about the engagement of indigenous communities. I support Minister Lametti in his work, which will take place over the next two fiscal years. Unless I'm mistaken, this money is to support the engagement of indigenous communities.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I'm wondering what the \$11 million will actually be used for.

Hon. Marc Miller: I don't have those details, but I could forward them to you.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I'd like you to do that if you have them, because it would help us see how this is progressing. Thank you.

I guess my two minutes are up, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I have one minute left? I was very quick. I'm surprised, because that's not usually the case, but Minister Miller is efficient.

I want to ask some more questions about the unmarked graves, the demolition and the \$320 million that was awarded. Of course, first nations communities have their own process to determine exactly what they want to do. It may take longer because of that process, but I would have liked to know where we are now and what exactly is being done with this \$320 million.

Has it been granted? Has a portion of this amount been allocated? Is any of it missing?

Hon. Marc Miller: Of course there will be some missing. It is a lot of money, of course, but this work is important, especially for those who are still affected by trauma. So it's worth it. Several departments are involved, including Canadian Heritage and Indigenous Services Canada, which I mentioned. A lot of support services are offered to survivors, which is important. These include mental health services that cost a lot of money.

As for the destruction and repair of buildings, many initiatives depend on the will of each community. It is not up to Ottawa to dictate the pace, tone or extent of the research. This is done at varying speeds, depending on the community affected. The situation is further complicated by the fact that some sites that were never on reserve or that are no longer in use are held by third parties.

I'll be doing an overview in May or June to give people an idea of what's going to happen. To date, many communities are involved in finding answers for their missing children.

• (1500)

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Gill.

[*English*]

Ms. Idlout, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Can we start with the response to my last question?

Hon. Dan Vandal: Sure. Thank you for that very important question. There's nothing more important than nutritious food for Canadians—young people, elders and seniors.

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

DEPARTMENT OF CROWN-INDIGENOUS RELATIONS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$972,219,379

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$328,287

Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....\$4,803,938,947

Vote L15—Loans to indigenous claimants.....\$25,903,000

(Votes 1, 5, 10 and L15 agreed to on division)

DEPARTMENT OF INDIGENOUS SERVICES

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$24,714,136,043

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$5,983,854

Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....\$14,745,696,586

(Votes 1, 5 and 10 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report the main estimates for 2022-23, less the amounts voted in the interim supply, to the House?

Mr. Michael McLeod: On division.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Just before you leave, I remind you that, next week, we will be continuing on Tuesday with the housing study.

On Friday, we will be looking at the report from the first study, and the clerk has informed me that she sent out the report to you today, so we have a week to study it.

We're looking for prioritized lists for the non-insured health benefit study by April 1.

We will also, the following week, have meetings on Tuesday the 5th and Friday the 8th, which will continue our housing study—all of this before the Easter break.

Thank you very much. We'll see you next week.

This meeting is adjourned.

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