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# Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

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Chair: Mr. Patrick Weiler





## Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

Monday, October 28, 2024

• (1535)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 126 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

As always, I want to start by recognizing that we are gathered on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people and to express gratitude that we're able to do the important work of this committee on lands that they've stewarded since time immemorial.

Pursuant to order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, September 16, the committee is commencing its study of the priorities of the ministers of Indigenous Services Canada and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada for the return of Parliament and their mandate.

I would like to welcome our witnesses today: the Honourable Gary Anandasangaree, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations; the Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Indigenous Services; and the Honourable Dan Vandal, Minister of Northern Affairs. They're going to be supported today by, from the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Valerie Gideon, deputy minister, and Georgina Lloyd, assistant deputy minister of northern affairs; and from the Department of Indigenous Services, Gina Wilson, deputy minister.

Ministers, welcome. You will have five minutes each for your opening statements, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

We'll start with the Honourable Gary Anandasangaree, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations.

The floor is yours.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations):** *Kwe kwe. Ulaakut. Tansi. Hello. Bonjour.*

Before I get started, I want to acknowledge that we're meeting on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

[Translation]

I'm pleased to be back before the committee today to outline my priorities as Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations.

[English]

Last week, I joined you to talk about Bill S-16, a bill that will recognize the Council of the Haida Nation as the government of the Haida people, something 50 years in the making. I want to thank you all for swiftly passing this through committee and for it being referred to the House.

As the minister responsible for this file, it requires constant reflection on the journey of reconciliation, both on how far we have come and how much more there is to do. Make no mistake—there is a lot of work to be done ahead.

Perhaps a fitting place to begin is with the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

[Translation]

This day was established in direct response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action number 80.

[English]

This year, in Millbrook First Nation, I walked in honour of Nora Bernard and heard from her daughter Natalie—both courageous voices of survivors. In Ottawa, I attended the “Remembering the Children” event, watched *Sugarcane* and re-raised the survivors' flag on Parliament Hill. We were reminded of the lasting scars left by residential schools, impacting survivors, families and communities, an impact that continues to echo today in every conversation we have about reconciliation.

When I talk about my priorities, I'm clear. Above all, they are listening to indigenous people, honouring their stories and moving forward in true partnership that reflects their lived experiences. With Bill C-29's passage, we fulfilled call to action 53, and the national council for reconciliation is taking shape. We also look forward to special interlocutor Kim Murray's report tomorrow. This is true partnership. It's not perfect, but we are committed to listening, adopting and doing what's right.

The national crisis of missing and murdered indigenous women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse people must end. We made progress with partners on about three-quarters of the calls for justice so far—as examples, funding 47 emergency shelters and transitional housing projects, delivering reliable Internet to over 27,000 indigenous households and working with the Government of Manitoba to advance a red dress alert pilot—but we need to accelerate this progress.

As we look to the future, we must ensure that the next generation has the resources and opportunities to thrive. On Friday, I announced \$20 million in annual funding for the Kinooaadziwin Education Body to support their infrastructure and governance needs. Chief Judy Desmoulin of Long Lake #58 First Nation talked about the increase of graduates, from eight to 90, in just six years alone. This is incredible. By investing in first nations-led education, we're investing in the future of reconciliation.

It all comes down to self-determination and securing a future in which the rights of indigenous peoples are respected and they have control over their lands, their waterways, their governance and their children, as laid out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Advancing self-government agreements and modern treaties is another way we're supporting indigenous peoples' inherent rights and championing self-determination. This summer, I was honoured to be initialling, with the Province of British Columbia, modern treaties with the Kitselas, Kitsumkalum and K'ómoks.

Through Bill C-77, we propose to establish a commissioner for modern treaty implementation. This legislation renders the status quo impossible. The commissioner will hold our government and all successive governments to account for their promises. This is a fundamental change. I hope every member of this committee ensures that this bill will be a priority in the chamber when debate opens. We must not let this, or any other piece of legislation, be delayed by the tactics of partisanship.

While my department has made progress, I share the frustration with the pace. Our work is far from done. Recent deaths of first nations people by law enforcement show the urgent need to act against systemic racism in our justice system. We must seek truth, ensure accountability and build trust.

As someone who has spent a lifetime advocating for human rights and justice, I understand that our journey towards reconciliation is an intergenerational effort and requires constant and collective efforts. Our government, my department and I remain committed to working alongside indigenous partners to rebuild trust, make real changes and ensure that the rights and voices of indigenous peoples are respected at every step of the way.

I look forward to your questions and comments. *Meegwetch. Qujannamiik. Marsi.* Thank you. *Merci.*

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

Next we go to the Honourable Dan Vandal, Minister of Northern Affairs, for five minutes or less.

**Hon. Dan Vandal (Minister of Northern Affairs):** Thank you. *Tansi. Ulaakut.* Hello. *Bonjour.*

Thank you for inviting me here today.

I look forward to providing further insight into my and our government's priorities regarding the north. My office and the department are always working alongside Arctic and northern partners to address local priorities and help them in having the resources to respond to their communities' needs. Our work is guided by the Arctic and northern policy framework.

I don't need to tell anyone here that one of the most significant challenges in the north is food security. On that, we're working with northern and indigenous partners, through the nutrition north Canada program, to make healthy food more affordable in the north. By subsidizing food and everyday items such as diapers, soap and personal hygiene products, the program has helped lower the costs of some items by as much as 76%. For example, in July this year, in Sachs Harbour in NWT, the cost of a five-kilogram bag of flour would be more than \$42 without the subsidy. It's now \$4.89, a huge difference for families and the community. There are examples like this in all 124 communities that fall under nutrition north.

We are also responding to food security in the north by adding \$23 million to the subsidy itself and over \$100 million in two other important programs: the harvesters support grant, which supports traditional hunting, harvesting and food sharing; and the community food programs fund, which supports community food-sharing initiatives. Since 2020 there were more than 15,000 harvests, with over 700 new food-sharing initiatives and 410 hunts and harvests taking place.

Another priority is narrowing the northern housing and infrastructure gap. Our government is working collaboratively to help increase the region's housing stock, reduce overcrowding and homelessness, improve housing conditions and assist communities with their specific needs. We're doing this through investments for self-determined housing and infrastructure development. This includes, of course, \$4.3 billion announced to co-develop and launch an urban, rural and northern indigenous housing strategy with, of course, indigenous partners. We know that self-determined, distinctions-based investments are working. As examples, since 2016, Inuit treaty organizations constructed over 650 new housing units, repaired over 469 existing units and developed land in their communities for new housing.

The north faces other significant challenges. The region is warming at four times the global average, with far-reaching consequences for people who live there, for wildlife and, of course, for the environment. We're working with indigenous and northern communities to address the effects of climate change, to help advance indigenous climate leadership and to shift to renewable sources of energy. Programs, such as the climate change preparedness in the north program, are helping to develop northern-led solutions to deal with coastal erosion, permafrost degradation and increased floods and wildfires.

All in all, food security, housing and climate change are three of the top priorities of the government that my department is addressing in the north and in the Arctic. Just a few weeks ago in Iqaluit, Premier P.J. Akeagok and I co-hosted an Arctic and northern policy framework leadership committee meeting, where we announced a new approach to helping improve the nutrition north program. Starting this year we will be appointing a ministerial special representative to conduct an external review, and chairing a research symposium with indigenous partners to discuss key findings.

To end, Mr. Chair, there are many pressing issues facing the north and the Arctic, and that's also true for indigenous peoples across the north and the Arctic. Our government is working hard with partners to deliver results on these long-standing issues.

I look forward to your questions, and it's great to be here. Thank you very much. .

• (1540)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

Last but certainly not least, I turn the floor over to the Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Indigenous Services, for five minutes or less.

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

To all members, hello, *kwe*, *ulaakut*, *tansi* and *bonjour*. I'm so pleased to be here with you today on the territory of the Algonquin peoples to discuss my priorities as Minister of Indigenous Services.

Supporting long-term and reliable access to clean water for first nations communities is a top priority for this government. For decades, boil water advisories have persisted in first nations communities, creating a shameful reality where families are living with uncertainty over their most basic need. We've been working with partners to ensure this reality in Canada comes to an end.

Over the last eight years, we've invested in communities, and today, 83% of the long-term drinking water advisories impacting first nations that were in place in 2015 have been lifted. These investments have also prevented over 275 short-term advisories from becoming long-term ones.

This summer, I was in Star Blanket Cree Nation to celebrate with them the opening of their new water treatment plant. The chief, council and water operators were so joyful to be able to bring this most essential service to their members. It was an honour to be with this community on such an emotional day.

We do see a path to all remaining advisories being lifted, but as we continue this work, we must make sure we never find ourselves back in this place again. Bill C-61 is our response: a commitment built on partnership, engagement and recognizing the inherent rights of first nations to manage and control their own water systems.

This bill creates the tools of self-determination for first nations to protect source water and maintain drinking water and waste-water infrastructure on first nation lands. You've heard from over 60 witnesses that the status quo needs to change, and as the committee is

set to begin clause-by-clause consideration very soon, I hope you will all treat this bill with the urgency that it deserves.

• (1545)

[Translation]

Children are the future, and ensuring that indigenous children have access to the services they need remains a shared responsibility.

[English]

All children and youth deserve a quality education. First nations, Inuit and Métis children should grow up with access to education that is aligned with their cultures and traditions without having to leave home. By working directly with communities, we have focused on building culturally mindful, healthy learning environments for indigenous students that reflect their distinct needs and priorities.

Earlier this month, I joined Piikani Nation to announce the funding for a new school facility that will serve over 600 students from kindergarten to grade 12 in their community. This \$50-million investment will make sure that kids have access to high-quality education while they stay deeply connected to their culture and their homes.

[Translation]

Supporting students contributes to the growth and prosperity of communities.

[English]

When we support these kinds of projects and communities, we're supporting future generations of indigenous leaders who are proud of where they come from and who they are.

[Translation]

We also believe in self-determination and support first nations-led health organizations and projects across the country, including the June 2024 agreement in principle with the Southern Chiefs' Organization in Manitoba.

[English]

We all recognize that historical trauma and colonization have contributed to the poor mental health and substance use challenges that many indigenous community members face.

By following the lead of indigenous partners in supporting holistic approaches to wellness, as well as indigenous-led, community-based and culturally relevant interventions, we are together building safer, healthier and more resilient communities.

[Translation]

First nations living in communities should also have access to primary care and safe, welcoming facilities to receive their health services. Our government has made progress in this area.

We have invested \$157.9 million in the Norway House Cree Nation Health Centre of Excellence, which opened in August 2024 and is the largest indigenous-run health centre in Manitoba.

[English]

I think the work we've done in partnership with indigenous communities since 2015 is making an important difference. We've come a long way, but we can't take our progress for granted. Members of Parliament of all political stripes can be part of lasting systemic change by moving on urgently needed legislation like bills C-61, C-38, C-23 and S-16.

Together, we really can build a system where everyone has a fair chance to succeed.

I'm looking forward to your questions. Thank you. *Meegwetch. Qujannamiik. Marsi. Merci.*

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

[English]

Before getting into the first round of questioning, I want to say to members that I want to make sure that for your questions you're going to have adequate time for answers, but I'm going to be very strict on making sure there's not too much crosstalk. However, it is the time of the questioners to ask questions. I just wanted to mention that, and I look forward to some very interesting testimony here.

Starting with the Conservative Party for the six-minute round, I have Mr. Genuis.

• (1550)

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Minister Hajdu, it's good to see you again.

You said, back in March, that the purpose of the indigenous business directory is to demonstrate the indigenous identity of those on the list. Is that still your position?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** The indigenous business directory serves as a tool to ensure that indigenous businesses have economic opportunities to benefit from procurement in Canada.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** I'm sorry. Can you just answer the question, though? You said in March that the purpose is to demonstrate indigenous identity. Is that correct?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** The list helps to ensure that indigenous businesses have an opportunity to compete for procurement contracts—

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Minister, could you just answer the question? That's what you said in March. Is it still true?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** The indigenous business—

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Is what you said in March still true?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** The indigenous directory is there to ensure that indigenous business and indigenous economic development can be furthered by the spend of the Government of Canada.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** That's not the question, and it's not the answer you gave in March.

However, in any event, you said in March that the purpose of the directory was to identify the indigeneity of those on the list. Why was the ArriveCAN contractor, Dalian Enterprises, removed from that list?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I don't have specifics, but I will turn to officials.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** I would like your answer, Minister. We heard from the officials on this last week. You weren't at OGGO. I'd like to hear from you now.

Why was ArriveCAN contractor Dalian Enterprises removed from the indigenous business list? Can we assume that it was determined not to be indigenous, or is there some other reason it was removed from the list?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I can't make assumptions on the administrative decisions of the department, but what I can tell you is that, if circumstances change in ownership structures of businesses, then they very well may be either added to the list or removed from the list.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Okay. Is Dalian Enterprises an indigenous business?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** We don't work with Dalian Enterprises. We don't have contracts with Dalian.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** I know, but you did. It received over \$100 million from the Government of Canada. It was part of the ArriveCAN contract. It was able to get it on the basis of an indigenous set-aside through a joint venture with a much larger company, even though it's only a two-person company.

Again, could you clarify why Dalian Enterprises was removed from the indigenous business list?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** We no longer have Dalian and joint venture companies on the list, and Indigenous Services Canada doesn't have, nor has had, any contracts with Dalian.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Why was it removed from that list, though?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** The officials have indicated that it was suspended on March 12 due to questionable factors. In fact, its suspension was announced on March 1, so it is no longer on the list.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** I'm aware that there are some questionable factors involving Dalian. That's why I'm asking questions about it.

Could you clarify this, please? If it was suspended or removed on March 1, what was the reason that it was removed?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I will just reiterate that the purpose of the list is to support—

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** No, Minister. I want you to answer the question. Why was it removed?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I will just reiterate that the purpose of the list—

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** No, Minister. You will answer the question. Why was it removed?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I have a question for you, Mr. Genuis.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** No. There may come a time when that's a possibility, but it's not today.

Maybe the deputy minister can answer, if the minister doesn't know.

Could our deputy minister share with us why it was removed?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. I don't know if I'm allowed to do that.

**The Chair:** I'm going to pause. There's some crosstalk happening here, and the member has asked a question. We should give the minister an opportunity to answer it before jumping into the next question.

Therefore, I'm going to restart the time.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** My question is simple. Either the minister can answer it, or maybe the deputy minister can answer it.

Why was Dalian Enterprises removed from the list?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, through you, I've given an answer to that question, and the list is not a permanent list—

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** No, you haven't.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —engraved in stone, as the member would know.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Why was it removed from the list, though?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Certainly, that list is something that is reviewed as per the request of other departments. The list exists—let's remind members—to ensure that economic development opportunities are there for indigenous businesses.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Thank you, Minister. Again, this reference to economic development is completely different from what you said when you appeared in March.

Your officials testified before the government operations committee last week that Dalian was removed because of reports in The Globe and Mail. Can you confirm that the decision to remove Dalian from the indigenous business list was based on things that your department read in The Globe and Mail? That's what your officials told us.

• (1555)

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Through you, Mr. Chair, that member may not think that this is about economic development, likely because his party has never focused on economic development for indigenous people—

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Minister, nobody is fooled by this. I asked a simple, clear question.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —but that is the purpose of the list. The list is there to make sure that indigenous businesses—

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Minister, nobody is fooled by this. I asked a simple, clear question—

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —have opportunities to compete for contracts.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** —and you're not answering it.

**The Chair:** There's too much crosstalk happening right now. It makes it very difficult for the interpreters to do their work. We've had numerous warnings and directives about this. I want to again remind members not to have this kind of crosstalk.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** I agree.

Could the minister answer the question, please?

**The Chair:** With that, I will restart the time. There's about a minute left.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you for reminding the minister.

Minister, it's my time. I have a very simple question here: Were your officials correct when they told the government operations committee that the decision to remove Dalian Enterprises from the indigenous business list was based on reports in The Globe and Mail?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Through you, Mr. Chair, the indigenous business list is an important tool for the Government of Canada to meet its procurement targets, something that I will note under the previous Conservative government they didn't pay any attention to, of course.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Thank you, Minister.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** We will continue to make sure that the list is accurate and up to date.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** You haven't answered a single question I've asked in the entirety of these six minutes, but I'll ask you one more. Since you have now established that Dalian isn't an indigenous company, and since it got over \$100 million in contracts from your government under indigenous set-asides, will you expect a company that was not indigenous and that got over \$100 million in indigenous set-aside contracts to pay back the money it received?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, I think “indigenous set-asides” is a misleading phrase. I don't expect anything else from Conservatives, who have no idea how procurement works and no idea what procurement targets mean. It doesn't mean that—

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** You know so little about your file. You have not answered a single question that I have asked in six minutes. You haven't even attempted to answer a single question that I have asked in six minutes. You have nothing—

**The Chair:** Mr. Genuis, your time is up.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** —but insults for other members rather than answers about your disastrous record of indigenous procurement. You should be ashamed of the job you've done.

**The Chair:** Mr. Genuis, your time is up.

I'll give the minister an opportunity to respond to that one.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** That member should be ashamed for not understanding that indigenous businesses have had a hard time competing for procurement with the Government of Canada. The work we're doing to ensure that indigenous businesses have an opportunity to benefit from the spend of Canada, I would say that it's the kind of activity that would be at risk under any Conservative government and we would see cuts to any kind of approach. In fact, I would imagine that member would call it too woke.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Genuis.

With that, we'll move to the second speaker in this first round.

Mr. Carr, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

I'll try to switch our tone a little bit here.

Ministers, it's nice to see you here. Thank you for making yourselves available for what is always an important discussion.

Before I get to my first question, Minister Vandal, I want to take this opportunity to mention your recent announcement that, after a very lengthy and successful career of serving the people of Winnipeg, Manitoba and Canada, you'll be spending some more time with your family. I've had the honour and privilege of knowing you since I was a young boy. I have tremendously benefited from your friendship, your counsel and your experience. I certainly am looking forward to having a few more minutes with you in this official capacity here today, but I did want to take the opportunity to congratulate you on an immensely meaningful career and your service to the people you and I both represent in our home province of Manitoba.

With that, Minister, there are two projects in particular under way right now in downtown Winnipeg. There's the revitalization of the Hudson's Bay building, which is a partnership we have with the Southern Chiefs' Organization. Then, of course, there's the huge redevelopment project being undertaken at Portage Place, which will see some of the \$633 million in federal health transfers that have gone from the federal government to the Province of Manitoba put to use, with, in addition to that, some very meaningful outcomes for indigenous folks and Winnipeggers as a whole across our city.

Can you tell us just a little bit about these two projects and the work you have been involved in as the PrairiesCan and northern affairs minister? How do you see these types of investments in first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples in particular as being meaningful to both the social and economic success of our province?

Thank you.

• (1600)

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Thank you so much for that question, MP Carr, and I thank you for your congratulations on my impending retirement from House of Commons and politics.

Yes, you were very young when I started, because in 2025 it'll be 30 years since I first represented Saint Boniface—Saint Vital as a city councillor, and since 2015, of course, I've represented it as a member of Parliament. It's been fantastic. It's all positive. I'm leaving with nothing but great memories, and I'm really.... Support for

the Prime Minister and the party, of course, is front and centre in my exit.

With regard to the question, I'll start with the recent announcement. About a month ago—six weeks ago—we were both in Winnipeg to announce a \$10-million investment in the redevelopment of Portage Place, which is a very big mall on Portage Avenue in the middle of downtown Winnipeg, across from the MTS centre. It represents a significant opportunity for downtown revitalization. The project is being undertaken by True North, which is the owner of the NHL Winnipeg Jets, by the Southern Chiefs' Organization and with funding from the Government of Manitoba, the Government of Canada, of course, and the City of Winnipeg.

When the project is complete, there will be a brand new health centre in downtown Winnipeg, which is funded largely by the \$600-million transfer that our government made to the Province of Manitoba for the health accord, something that was a long time coming. There will be a health care centre. There will be a couple of hundred units of affordable housing, which are going to be managed and owned by the Southern Chiefs' Organization, and there also will be some pretty interesting and inclusive public space, which PrairiesCan is paying for in part as part of the overall redevelopment.

That project, Portage Place, is connected to the old Hudson's Bay building, for which there is another partnership ongoing between the Government of Canada and the Southern Chiefs' Organization. There will be day care spaces in there. There will be hundreds of units of affordable housing. There will be a museum that's going to be owned and managed by Southern Chiefs' Organization, and there's going to be space for their government administrative offices.

Really, it's one of these old Bay buildings in downtown Winnipeg. I think it's upwards of 600,000 square feet in the downtown that's currently vacant, and we're really looking forward to that partnership. Our government, through the Department of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, through CMHC, has invested over \$100 million in that partnership. I know it will create hundreds of indigenous jobs, which will benefit not only indigenous communities but also the province as a whole.

If you take another hop, skip and jump further east, you're going to see the the Manitoba Métis Federation, which is, of course, the governing body of the Red River Métis. It's constructing a Métis national heritage centre at Portage and Main, where Bobby Hull signed a million-dollar contract in 1972. That's going to be featuring Métis heritage, Métis culture and the very bright future that the Métis have in Manitoba and Canada. We're working closely with the Manitoba Métis Federation on that project, and that strip of Portage Avenue in downtown Winnipeg will be transformed through our partnership.

**Mr. Ben Carr:** Thank you very much, Minister.

I know my time is up. It's amazing what happens when you allow ministers the opportunity to give thorough responses such as that.

Thank you very much. I'm looking forward to the following questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Carr.



[Translation]

Mr. Lemire, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For practical purposes, my comments will fall somewhere in between.

Minister Hajdu, it's important for me to talk to you about economic reconciliation—I don't think this will come as a surprise to you—as well as about structural and meaningful capacity-building tools for first nations so that they can focus on their priorities and well-being.

• (1605)

[English]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, I can't seem to get the translation. I just want to make sure.... I do understand most, but I want to make sure I'm fully understanding.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** I'll reset the clock for Mr. Lemire, but first I want to make sure that the minister can hear the interpretation.

It seems to be working now. So we'll start again.

Mr. Lemire, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate it.

Madam Minister, I'd like to talk about economic reconciliation, as well as structural and meaningful capacity-building tools for first nations so that they can focus on their priorities and well-being.

Every time we've had the opportunity to ask you questions, the Bloc Québécois has noted the innovative financial tools currently being used by Quebec's indigenous communities. These tools have a direct impact on each of these communities, and are an opportunity to do away with programs that are ill suited to their modern reality.

You're familiar with the Yänonhchia' program. It's an indigenous housing finance model designed, directed and managed by indigenous people. You've had access to this file since February 2023, if not longer. What do you intend to do with it?

There is indeed an indigenous middle class now, but the federal government seems once again intent on ignoring it and any solutions for indigenous communities in Quebec and Canada.

It's October 2024. Have you had an exchange with Minister Freeland about the Yänonhchia' program?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Thank you for that very important question.

Yes, I have discussed the program with my colleagues as well as with Chief Haymond, who leads it.

[English]

We have also, as you know, proceeded in the same direction that you're talking about, Monsieur Lemire, regarding self-determination and housing, with the urban, rural and northern indigenous housing strategy, which sets aside \$4 billion for first nations, Inuit and Métis distinctions-based housing that is obviously off reserve

but certainly in areas of Canada where many first nations and indigenous peoples live.

I am excited about the programs—

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Let's get back to the Yänonhchia' program, Minister.

What can we expect? Will your department be investing in the Yänonhchia' project, either in an economic statement or in the next budget?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I can't speak about the fall economic statement and its content, as I'm not the Minister of Finance.

However, I often speak with the minister and my colleagues about self-determination for indigenous peoples. It's very important to have programs like Yänonhchia', for example, which provide new tools for indigenous communities.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** In the context of true reconciliation from an economic and equity standpoint, I'd also like to discuss insurance pooling, financing and the Autorité financière des Premières Nations.

There need to be risk management mechanisms in place for indigenous communities where individuals or entities combine their resources to share the tax burden and any potential losses. By coming together, members reduce the impact of individual claims, meaning a more predictable distribution of risk and lower overall costs for each member involved.

Obviously, you've been made aware of this. I'd like to know what answers you have. Can we expect any good news in the coming year?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** There's a lot of enthusiasm for new approaches to mitigating infrastructure risks and improving housing affordability for indigenous communities.

[English]

That's the reason we've been working not only with people like Chief Haymond, but also through large economic partners, like the major banks in the country, to talk about de-risking lending, for example, for first nations communities and about creating better tools for first nations communities so that they are able to pursue infrastructure at their own speed.

We also have other tools for first nations that allow for full self-determination in terms of priorities, like 10-year agreements that allow for first nations communities to receive block funding over 10 years, so that they are able to plan for a variety of different social and infrastructure needs across the board.

• (1610)

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** I think what the Autorité financière des Premières Nations and Yānonhchia' specifically are asking for is quite reasonable, especially as it increases the movement of capital within first nations. This would be a self-determination lever in the long term.

Do you think these requests are excessive? Personally, I think these amounts are reasonable, but I'd like to know what you think.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** In general, I think this approach is reasonable. That's why it was announced by the Minister of Finance in the 2024 budget.

[English]

She announced a capital markets fund for first nations, so they are able to access major capital—for example, to buy into big infrastructure projects. They will have the capital to do that. This is the direction we're taking as a government.

We'll ensure financial tools are in place, as well, to support full economic participation and greater self-determination in communities.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** I'd like to ask one last quick question.

Do you agree that it costs more for indigenous communities to complete projects than it does, say, for white people?

[English]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Absolutely. The expense of building anything in first nations, particularly in remote first nations, is amplified.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you, *meegwetch*.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Lemire.

[English]

Before starting Ms. Idlout's time, I want to do a quick sound check. We'll have a brief pause for that before we get going.

• (1610)

(Pause)

• (1610)

**The Chair:** With that, we can start back up.

Ms. Idlout, I will turn the floor over to you for six minutes or less.

**Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP):** [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you, Chairperson.

I thank the ministers for their briefing.

My first question will be for Minister Vandal. It will be on the food security subsidy.

**The Chair:** Ms. Idlout, I'm sorry. I'm going to have to stop you. There's an issue with the translation.

Ms. Idlout, I'm going to restart your time so you have the full six minutes.

I'll turn it over to you for six minutes.

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you, Chairperson.

Thanks, ministers, for this question period.

My question is for Minister Vandal. On the nutrition north subsidy, you stated that, back in May, they were doing a study. It has taken a few months to conduct this study. When will you be able to produce a report?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** I'm hoping to produce a report as soon as possible. The internal review by the public service is currently ongoing. This is something in progress right now. We are going to begin an external review very shortly, as soon as possible.

While in Iqaluit recently with the Premier of Nunavut, I announced there will be a minister's special representative who will do the external review of nutrition north. I think it's important we make sure that all of the assumptions from the internal are also reviewed as part of the external. As part of this process, northerners are widely consulted—not only leaders but also users of nutrition north. I think that is important. I've gotten a lot of feedback.

• (1615)

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Can you give us three points on what you have found through this study?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Thus far, we've talked to a lot of people about the study.

I think they're reviewing the data now on how the subsidy is passed through to the consumer—to northerners. I want to make sure that every single penny of the retail subsidy goes directly to northerners. That's why we're being extra vigilant. The public service is reviewing the data.

Many people we speak to say there is some benefit to the nutrition north program.

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

I'm sorry. I don't have a lot of time. I was hoping to hear a shorter response.

Now my question will be for Minister Patty Hajdu because of the time restraint we have.

You told us, for example, about Bill C-61 and Bill C-23. Those pertain to indigenous people. My question, Minister Hajdu, is why these bills haven't reached indigenous communities. They don't seem to be effective. As indigenous people, we are rights holders, but they are not respected.

Can you give us a clear response, please?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Thank you very much.

Some of the bills I listed, as you know, are under way. Bill C-61 is currently in front of this committee and, as I said, we'll be going through clause-by-clause. That's very important.

We hope we will see less obstruction in the House of Commons so that bills like Bill C-38 can actually get debated. Bill C-38, as you know, is about continuing to address inequities—in particular, gender-based inequities—in the Indian Act. There are families waiting for that bill to be debated in the House to finish the important work so that we can right these wrongs.

What we need is committees doing the important work on Bill C-61. On Bill C-38, we need to see movement in the House so that the debate can actually continue on legislation that matters to Canadians.

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you.

My last question comes from the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and Chief Walter Wastesicoot from the Keewatin Tribal Council. I was told that the Jordan's principle process is too slow. There's \$8 million yet to be given out. This is to be doled out over two years, but your staff are too slow.

Can you tell us why the process is too slow? How are you trying to speed up the process?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Thank you very much.

One of the most important things we've done, and an early thing we did as a government, was to implement Jordan's principle in 2016. Since then, first nations children have received more than 7.6 million products, services and supports. This is about \$8.1 billion in services and supports.

We're going to continue to work to ensure that the incredible demand—which is a good problem to have, because people know about the program—can be met with efficiency and processes that get people and families the services they need.

• (1620)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Idlout.

That concludes our first round of questioning.

Moving on to the second round, we'll start with the Conservative Party and Mr. Zimmer.

You have five minutes.

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

Thank you, Minister, for appearing at committee.

We've even heard from one of your Manitoban colleagues that this might be one of your last appearances at committee, so again, thank you for appearing today.

We saw not long ago that you were openly critical of the Prime Minister around a Senate appointment in Manitoba. I have an article from *The Globe and Mail*, which reads:

A federal Liberal cabinet minister is criticizing Charles Adler's appointment to the Senate, saying there are Manitobans better suited to represent the province....

Northern Affairs Minister Dan Vandal...offered his view in a statement his office released on Monday... "There are many eminently qualified Manitobans who are better suited to represent our province than Charles Adler," he said.

We even saw our chair recently make public a comment about a concern around the sitting Prime Minister. In a CBC article just last week, entitled, "Some Liberal MPs issue a deadline to Trudeau: make up your mind to stay or go by Oct. 28", it reads, "Sources said MP Patrick Weiler read a letter to Trudeau today during the party's caucus meeting on Parliament Hill—

**Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I'm not sure the content of what Mr. Zimmer is saying right now has anything to do with this committee meeting.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** It does, I can reassure him.

**The Chair:** I want to remind members that we're here today to discuss the priorities of our three ministers for this committee.

I'll ask the member to keep it relevant to the topic at hand today.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** It is. I'm just about there.

It says, "Sources said MP Patrick Weiler read a letter to Trudeau today during the party's caucus meeting on Parliament Hill, laying out the arguments in favour of the prime minister resigning now."

Seeing such public dissatisfaction with the Prime Minister, when you talked about priorities—

**Ms. Anna Gainey (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I would like to reiterate what my colleague said. I don't believe this has any relevance to or bearing on this meeting.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** It does.

I'm just about done my question, Chair.

**The Chair:** I'll just remind the members again to keep it relevant to the topic we're here to discuss, which we all agreed we would discuss. The time is very valuable. I know that we want to hear the answers from our ministers. They're here today.

I've paused the time, Mr. Zimmer. Please get to the question.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Yes. I'll get back to the question.

You talked about priorities, Minister. For me and I think many Canadians, priorities in Canada start right at the top with leadership. The question is around the leadership of this Prime Minister.

Seeing the public dissatisfaction with the Prime Minister, have you lost confidence in the Prime Minister?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** To answer your question, no. I support the Prime Minister 110% to continue to lead the party and the country. I support the Liberal Party 110% to continue to be the governing party.

On your reference to Charles Adler, I'll let my statement stand. I stand by it today. I think the whole issue of senatorial appointments is tricky. I will go back 10 years, when we heard the names Mike Duffy—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Thanks, Minister.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:**—Patrick Brazeau and Pamela Wallin—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** You've answered the question.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:**—who were all appointed by your government.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** He has answered the question, Chair. Can I ask the next question?

**The Chair:** I believe the minister is finishing his answer to the question.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** He answered the question. He already said where he stands.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** I've finished my answer. We've appointed an independent committee to make recommendations on who becomes—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Chair, can I have my time? You said at the beginning of the meeting that it's the questioner's time.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** He's answered the question. He's actually answered two of my questions, and I want to ask the next question.

**The Chair:** I have paused the time. This crosstalk can't continue for the reasons I've already made clear.

**The Chair:** Fair enough.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** He's continuing to extrapolate on one of the answers, and I'm ready to ask the next question.

**The Chair:** Mr. Zimmer, I will turn it back over to you. You have two and a half minutes left.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Thank you. Perfect.

Thank you again, Minister.

The Prime Minister and your government have been in power for the last nine years. Clean drinking water is still not done despite the PM's promise in 2015 to have all boil water advisories lifted by 2021. Food is expensive, made worse by the Prime Minister's carbon tax. Heating costs are high and made a lot worse by the Prime Minister's carbon tax. Housing needs in Canada are highest in Nunavut and getting worse. To give you some numbers from the "Northern Housing Report", which is right in front of me, 49% of families in Nunavut are unable to affordably secure market housing, and, for a more stark number, more than 80% of families can't afford to purchase a single detached home in Nunavut. That points to an exceptionally high poverty rate in Nunavut, the highest in the country. As well, our Arctic sovereignty is more at risk than at any point in our history.

Minister, countless promises made by the Prime Minister to northerners have been broken. Countless announcements won't feed, heat or house northerners. A lot of promises have been made and a lot of money spent, but there's little to show for it.

I guess what is mystifying to me is this: With such a bad record in the north, how can you still have confidence in the Prime Minister?

• (1625)

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Thank you for that question, first of all. I think the challenges in the north are significant. They have always been there through chronic underfunding by all governments, including some previous governments that were of our stripe and yours.

I believe we've done a good job in addressing the affordability crisis, whether it's the school food program, which was rolled out earlier in the year, that will put nutritious food in all students' bellies—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Minister, I spoke about very specific things here, which you're not mentioning.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:**—or the child care program, the \$10—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** How are you doing on housing?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Will you let me answer?

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** I would like answers to these questions.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** When the \$10-a-day day care program was first implemented, the first jurisdiction was in Nunavut. I've heard many positive things about that. Your party voted against it.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** What about the poverty rate and the housing in Nunavut?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Dental care, which will help thousands of children all over Canada and thousands in the north, your party voted against. The school food program—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** How about drinking water?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:**—your party voted against it.

We lifted a hundred—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** How about carbon tax?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Can I answer?

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** I've asked you—

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Can I answer the water question?

**The Chair:** Mr. Zimmer, the time is up.

I'll give the minister a couple of seconds to finish the answer.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** One hundred and forty-five boil water advisories were lifted since we were in government. It's not perfect, but it's very good. That's 145 more boil water advisories than 10 years of Stephen Harper and Pierre Poilievre.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Zimmer.

Moving to the second questioner in the second round, Ms. Gainey, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Anna Gainey:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to welcome all our witnesses and thank them for coming. It's a pleasure to have them with us today.

My question is for the Minister of Indigenous Services.

[*English*]

Minister Hajdu, you raised the importance of education in your opening remarks, including the investment in a new K-to-12 school on Piikani Nation, which sounds like an incredibly positive step for that community.

UNDRIP also underscores the importance of education in article 14, paragraph 2, highlighting the right of indigenous individuals to access education “without discrimination”.

In Quebec, the implementation of Law 14, more commonly known as Bill 96, is creating new and unfair obstacles that discriminate against indigenous CEGEP students and that undercut their chances of graduation. Students are frustrated and rightfully feel that they ought to be supported in their pursuit of higher education, but instead, many have expressed feeling set up to fail.

Can you speak to the importance of removing barriers to education for indigenous students, particularly in my home province of Quebec? Thank you.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Thank you very much.

I would count Regional Chief Picard as one of my most trusted advisers, actually. He and I have spoken a lot about any kind of barrier that presents a challenge for graduation being, in particular, even more detrimental for indigenous students or for other students with vulnerabilities.

What I can say is that the focus of our federal Liberal government has been to really ensure that education is at the core of what we do. In fact, when we were first elected, I have to tell you that one of our first actions was to reverse the discriminatory funding for education systems on first nations. The Conservatives had kept first nation education systems barely able to keep the lights on. In fact, many first nation boards of education really struggled to deliver curriculum, with, in many cases, a significant disparity between what was offered for provincial students in the same setting. That's why not only equity in funding but also reshaping how we support communities to deliver their own education, culturally appropriate education, is leading to increases.

My colleague here spoke about Judy Desmoulin, Long Lake #58, and the incredible success rate they're seeing. I have to say that's in my riding, and I'm really proud of communities that are able to turn things around, from seeing very few students graduate to seeing almost the whole grade 12 class graduate.

In Quebec, for example, in 2022, one of the most wonderful moments of my year that year was signing an agreement with 22 first nations to manage and deliver education for over 6,000 students in their own communities with their own developed curriculum.

I will say this. We work really hard to support first nations to make sure that they have all the appropriate supports in place so

that those students are set up for success. We're seeing the results. The graduation rates over the last five years for indigenous students have increased by 10%. That sounds like a small number, but it's huge and significant to those students who are going to go on to be the leaders of those communities.

I can tell you that in Biigtigong, which is also in my riding—a community I know very well—when students graduate as teachers, as doctors, as construction workers, as water operators, they go back to the community and they build a strong community. Those communities have such a wonderful chance to thrive. That's the work we're doing together with first nation communities.

• (1630)

**Ms. Anna Gainey:** Thank you for that.

I think there is definitely a commitment and a desire to do that work. I hope perhaps that we can continue that work with Mr. Picard and that we can address the needs in my riding, in those communities in particular where those kids at CEGEP are really struggling right now with their climate. It's just very heartbreaking to see that.

I have one minute left, so I'm going to share it with my colleague Mr. Hanley.

Thank you.

**Mr. Brendan Hanley:** Thank you for that.

I will perhaps start with Minister Anandasangaree. I know you haven't had a chance to speak very much so far, so I'll perhaps begin with you and will hopefully continue in a subsequent round.

You will have just received—and may not have had a chance to read it yet—a letter from Judy Gingell, chair of the Yukon Residential Schools and Missing Children Project, about support for funding. In a nutshell, the request is for some certainty and predictability in funding for the YRSMCP working group to know they have a clear pathway towards ground searches at residential schools and institutions. I wonder if you could comment briefly on that, and perhaps reassure the chair that the funding will be there.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Thank you for that question.

I look forward to a wholesome answer later on, but suffice it to say that we've been committed, from the outset of Kamloops, to be there with communities every step of the way. That commitment hasn't wavered at all.

I look forward to giving a more fulsome answer next round.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Gainey and Mr. Hanley.

[Translation]

Mr. Lemire, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to talk about francophone groups within indigenous communities. It's somewhat related to my colleague's question.

What measures are your departments implementing to ensure that there is no language-based discrimination and that indigenous organizations receiving the funding they are entitled to can in turn offer francophone communities the documents they need to participate in consultations on issues of interest to them?

Can you tell us whether indigenous communities are eligible for Canadian Heritage programs that exist for these purposes, and provide us with a written list of those that have applied? If so, can you tell us about the decision, i.e., was the application successful or not, and how much have these communities received over the past five years?

I have the impression that there's a big gap here and that it's preventing francophones and indigenous groups from really getting along.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I'm sorry, but I can't speak to other departments' programs, as I'm not familiar with them.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Still, I'd invite you to look into the issue, because I think there's a gap there.

I'd also like to talk to you about a very important request from the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador that has to do with the fundamental issue of police services in their communities. I'm talking about legislation recognizing that first nations policing is an essential service and must be funded accordingly.

The Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador has made this issue a priority, and it has very high expectations, yet it is still waiting on the legislation. Where does this legislation stand? When will it finally be tabled?

• (1635)

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** My colleague Minister LeBlanc is working with the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador and with the provinces on this very important matter.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** We look forward to seeing some results.

I'd now like to turn to the Jay Treaty. This issue may be Minister Anandasangaree's responsibility, but it also ties in with an announcement made by another one of your colleagues.

Last week, Minister Miller made an announcement about the movement of people at various ports of entry. Indigenous communities want to be assured that you have taken all the necessary steps to ensure that the measures announced will not hinder their travel to the United States, which in their case can be on an almost daily basis.

When will the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act be amended to facilitate the movement of indigenous peoples from their communities to Canada?

[English]

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Thank you for the question.

I can assure you that an enormous amount of work has gone into mobility rights, over many years. It's a two-way issue: first nations, Inuit and Métis from Canada to the U.S., and vice versa. I can assure you that every measure will be taken to ensure the process is fair, equitable and accessible to our partners.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you, *meegwetch*.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Lemire.

[English]

Next, we'll go to Ms. Idlout for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you, Chairperson.

My first question will be for Minister Anandasangaree.

I'm not sure what this is called in Inuktitut, but the special interlocutor will be hosting a conference. I heard they've been requesting documents, but they haven't been given any documents up to this point.

Can you explain how you have supported Kimberly, so her role can be effective?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Thank you for your question.

The special interlocutor was appointed about two years ago by the Minister of Justice, and I was there at the time of her appointment. I've had engagements with her. My office has continuously had engagements with her. We're looking forward to her report. This is her final report. I have read her interim report, and I'm looking forward to receiving the final report tomorrow. I think all three of us will be in attendance, and we will be able to respond in a more wholesome manner.

I know the work she's doing is very important as we address the issues around missing children and residential schools. There are a number of different parts to the report. I'm not sure if the interim report and final report are in the same order or manner, in terms of presentation. However, it is important that, as a government, we have a wholesome response to her report after reviewing it and looking at the feasibility of the many elements of the report we're expecting tomorrow.

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you.

I don't have a lot of time, so I'll pass it to somebody else.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Idlout.

Next, we will move to Mr. Schmale for five minutes.

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

Thank you to our witnesses.

Minister Hajdu, as you know, friendship centres are crucial parts of the indigenous landscape, and their core funding is set to expire.

What assurances can you give this committee that they will receive an answer before March 31?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Through the chair, thank you very much.

I'll say that we've worked incredibly hard to support indigenous friendship centres, and we're very proud of the relationship we have. We'll continue to work with them to make sure they can continue to deliver their services to urban indigenous people.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Do we have a positive answer here, or are you not confident?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I can tell you that this government has been very supportive of indigenous friendship centres, and we'll continue to do that.

It's kind of exciting to hear a Conservative member talk about core funding. I'm very excited to hear that this is your vision.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** I'm glad you're excited.

I'm excited because I also want to talk about indigenous procurement, which is something—

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I look forward to your supporting my budget letter.

• (1640)

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** We'll see about that.

Regarding indigenous procurement, a few months ago, you talked about the indigenous business directory being something that determines whether or not a business is indigenous. Now, today, you are saying it's to help create jobs in the indigenous community.

Regardless of your stance changing, it looks like we have a new company here—the Canadian Health Care Agency—that has managed to secure funding of over \$100 million. It meets neither of those criteria.

Why is that?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Let me be clear that the indigenous business directory is there to support procurement from indigenous businesses. That is the entire purpose of the list.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Then how did the Canadian Health Care Agency get in?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** The value statement behind that list is this: This government believes indigenous economic development is incredibly important, but indigenous partners have not had the same opportunities—

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** I got that. You mentioned that earlier.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —to participate in procurements in Canada. To reach the procurement target, we support different departments—

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Okay. That's perfect.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —in order to understand who might be eligible and considered indigenous, so they—

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** That's great.

The Canadian Health Care Agency meets neither of the two changing statements you made.

How did they continue to get additional contracts from the federal government through the indigenous procurement angle when they were not indigenous majority-owned? How did you miss that?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** The list is curated to make sure it includes people's companies as those companies change in formation. Certain companies may have indigenous partners at times and may reform. The indigenous partners may sell their shares. I'm sure you understand this. The Conservatives are the party of big business and understand how business works.

You do know that businesses change their ownership structures, and—

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Your department gave over \$100 million to a company that checks neither of those boxes.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I will say that this particular business has also provided important health services to first nations people in the community.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** How did that slip though?

**The Chair:** We have a point of order here.

**Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I've raised this before.

I don't think I'm the only one who has this challenge. Anybody wearing a headset, including the interpreters, can't follow when there's more than one voice over the microphones. Hopefully, we can find a way to resolve this, because I can't follow what's going on.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for raising that, Mr. McLeod. You're absolutely right in this.

The crosstalk that's happening does need to stop here, so I'll just remind all members to consider the health of those with challenges hearing, as well as our interpreters, when you're considering talking over another person.

I have paused the time. There are another two minutes left for Mr. Schmale.

I'll pass the floor back to you.

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

In 2016, this company had an audit that showed very clearly that none of these boxes were checked. Given that the AFN at another committee's meeting talked about how most of these indigenous contracts have gone out to shell companies that are not indigenous owned and that are not creating jobs for indigenous people, how do you continue to stand behind this program?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I think I've been clear that the program is currently considered under review with first nations partners about how to better deal with the challenge of proving indigeneity, and I'll just say that proving indigeneity is deeply rooted in a colonial structure of deciding who's indigenous or not. We've been working with a number of indigenous business partners, including a number of esteemed individuals, to decide how best to move forward. However, what I will say is that—

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Minister—

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** If I could finish, Mr. Chair....

**The Chair:** I'm going to pause again here.

Mr. McLeod just brought this point up. This is going to be a problem, and this very much needs to stop.

I'm going to pass the floor back to Mr. Schmale.

You have about 50 seconds left.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Thank you.

Thank you, Minister.

How many businesses have been removed from this list?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** What I can say—

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** I just want a number.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —is that this list provides a very important tool to the Government of Canada to ensure that indigenous economic development—

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Mr. Chair, she's not going to answer the question.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —continues to be driven through a procurement process.

I want to quote Philip Ducharme.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** How many have been removed? Just give a ballpark number.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I'd like to quote....

Mr. Chair, I'm looking for your direction. You have to—

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Okay. How about Canadian Health Care Agency?

**The Chair:** I'm going to pause again here.

• (1645)

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** She's not answering the question. I only have 50 seconds.

**The Chair:** There are about 25 seconds left. I want to give Mr. Schmale the opportunity to ask his question and for the minister to answer it.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Okay.

Can the Canadian Health Care Agency still apply for contracts under this program?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Any company can still apply for contracts, but it would not be included on the list as indicating that it is an indigenous-owned business.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Is that just since 2016, then?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** What I would say is that indigeneity and the capacity to procure for the Government of Canada are two separate considerations. A business would not be counted as an indigenous business if it's not on the indigenous business list. I would say that it's important to understand that businesses can change in ownership. If that's the case or if a business is flagged, as Dalian was, by Public Services and Procurement Canada as needing to be removed as a result of a significant security status breach, those things would be immediately acted upon.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** The Canadian Health Care Agency was flagged in 2016, and it still receives funding.

**The Chair:** Colleagues, I'm going to step in again here. The time is up. That's actually much exceeded the time. However, again, I just want to remind members not to have this crosstalk.

With that, we're going to move over to our next questioner.

Mr. Hanley, you have five minutes or less.

**Mr. Brendan Hanley:** Thank you.

During my short previous round, I omitted to thank all three of you, ministers, and the officials for coming. Thank you so much for being here.

Minister Anandasangaree, with regard to the letter from Judy Gingell, chair of the Yukon Residential School Missing Children Project, I just want to read out two paragraphs from the letter very briefly to get your response.

One paragraph says:

This prolonged uncertainty is detrimental to our planning and execution of the vital work initiated by the YRSMCP Working Group. Not to mention the added stress imposed on the Survivors who have committed themselves to this work but now feel silenced by these delays.

Later on, it says:

It is imperative that we establish open lines of communication and ensure that all projects receive the timely support they need to fulfill our shared commitment to addressing the legacy of residential schools and supporting the families affected by this tragic history.

Minister, I believe that communities shouldn't have to limit their work on this subject due to the prospect of uncertain funding available from the federal government. I wonder if you can share some clarity on how the funding will continue to work and perhaps provide some certainty to the YRSMCP working group—and others around the country, for that matter.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Thank you for that very important question.

Let me say at the outset that I had an opportunity this summer to meet in Yukon with the communities that are doing the work on missing children. This summer, the department imposed a cap of \$500,000 because of the demand that came forward from those who were doing the work. I note that all of the communities are at different stages of seeking answers.



So far, we have invested \$323 million in supporting communities through the fund. Right now, as we speak, we continue to approve funding requests even above the million-dollar mark. The deadline for applications is November 15, so we continue to assess the nature of the applications and are making sure that we can best support them.

We will need additional funds, which we are very committed to seeking from the Minister of Finance, in order to ensure that there is funding going forward. However, I can assure the communities doing the work that, from the outset—from the time of Kamloops to now—we have been with the communities every step of the way, and we have continued to support projects that have been working directly with communities that are working on specific projects based in their local communities. In Yukon, I believe all 14 communities are working together on one project, which is one of the issues I talked about, because there are a number of different communities that may have different projects in mind that we can also work with.

Our department has been very open to having discussions with communities and those groups that are working to secure funding, and we will continue to be available. Make no mistake, though; we will ensure that there is funding for communities every step of the way. It's a commitment that Minister Miller made, that I have made and that the Prime Minister has made. We will not leave anyone behind.

• (1650)

**Mr. Brendan Hanley:** Thank you so much for that reassurance.

Minister Hajdu, I have just over a minute, but I want to refer to the study carried out by this committee previously. I was able to sub in for one or two meetings on the non-insured health benefits, NIHB, program. Of course, this is used by Yukoners every day.

After the study by this committee, the government response in April 2023 outlined some progress. It said, for example, “The review of the medical transportation benefit is in progress, and provides a space for the NIHB Program to hear key issues and priorities raised by First Nations partners”.

Particularly with regard to medical travel, because I hear a lot of ongoing concerns, could you update me on what you're hearing and how the government is really going to respond to improvements in the medical travel component of the NIHB?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Certainly, I can't speak to the outcomes yet, because the study is still under way, as you know, with the AFN, but we too have heard concerns about medical travel. As you know, we have worked with territories significantly on medical travel and we have supported the territories—you would know this as a former health official in a territory—with the significant cost burden that families and health care systems have faced for medical travel. This is work that I think is critically important.

To your point, there have been some really great outcomes since your study. One that I'm very excited about—I know we're running out of time, Mr. Chair—is the newfangled modern glucose monitors that are now fully covered for people who are managing their diabetes with insulin. We're matching provincial and territorial coverage. The reason I raise this is that I met some people in my com-

munity—health care practitioners, in fact—who talked about the game-changer this is for people's health outcomes. It's lessening the burden on health care systems, including reducing things like the need for medical travel for complex diabetes care, so it's—

**The Chair:** Thank you. I'm sorry. I'm going to have to stop it there.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** It's exciting. That's all I can say.

**The Chair:** We're well over the time.

Thank you very much, Mr. Hanley. That concludes our second round of questioning.

Moving on to the third round, Mr. Shields, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With regard to housing, Minister Hajdu, can you tell me how many new housing units have been built?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I can tell you that we've increased funding by 1,300% since we took office. Right now, we're supporting the construction, renovation and retrofit of over 36,000 homes, and we're co-developing a 10-year housing and infrastructure strategy. This is work that we are continuing through investments for housing and infrastructure through budget 2024.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** I'm just looking for a split on the number of new houses—not the renovations but just the number of new houses.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I don't have that number for you, but we'll make sure that your office gets it.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** Thank you.

I'll turn my time over to Garnett.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Thank you.

Minister Hajdu, my colleague earlier asked about a case involving the Canadian Health Care Agency. It is a non-indigenous company, very clearly. It was able, nonetheless, to take advantage of contracts that were supposed to go to indigenous companies because it entered into a joint venture. Its partner in the joint venture was a one-person company, and that one person happened to be an employee of the company. It said, “Hey, let's go into joint venture with one of our employees. Therefore, we will call ourselves an indigenous partnership, even though this is a totally non-indigenous company.”

Can we at least agree that this is a clear instance of an abuse of the program? Would you agree that this is an abuse of the program?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I would say that the quote from Philip Ducharme, vice-president of CCIB, is very important here. He said, “We cannot allow a few bad actors to cause us to move backwards on crucial support mechanisms designed to [help the] indigenous communities.”

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Minister, let me jump in.

I've engaged actively with the CCIB. We've brought them to the government operations committee. I agree that the objective of supporting indigenous economic development.... I agree with their objective.

I want to ask you the question that I asked you already, which is this: Do you think that this particular case is an instance of a bad apple?

• (1655)

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** They have been removed from the IBD, and I think that's an important indication—

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** That's right, but was this an abuse of the program?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —of exactly why that list is important and why integrity matters.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Minister, was this an abuse of the program, though? I guess you're saying it was removed, so clearly it was an abuse of the program, in your view. However, you seem unwilling to say “yes”.

Was this an abuse of the program?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I would say that it was an abuse of being on the list without adequate representation.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Should it pay the money back that it received under the indigenous procurement program?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** In the case of this particular health care agency, two things can be true at one time. The second thing that's true is that we have a nationwide nursing shortage. You may have heard of this, actually. I do get up and talk about it occasionally.

In fact, although this—

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Minister, I'm going to jump in because you're going far afield with the question.

What we have here is cultural appropriation leading to financial misappropriation. That is, you have people who are pretending to be indigenous in order to get money that they're not supposed to be accessing. It is precisely this that has led the AFN to say that, in its view, a majority of companies getting these opportunities that are established in the set-aside are shell companies.

Do you see the problem here, and do you agree that your government needs to be accountable for this failure?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** What I see clearly is a plan for Conservative cuts around a program that is actually about indigenous economic development.

However, I will say this—

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Minister, could you answer the question?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, could I finish?

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Let me ask you this, Minister—

**The Chair:** Mr. Genuis, I paused your time here again, so you have about 45 seconds left.

I think we're all very interested in hearing the answers of the ministers here, so please do give the minister time to respond to the question. I will give you back your 45 seconds, but just with that proviso.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Mr. Chair, let me just ask very precisely.

If you have an instance of cultural appropriation leading to financial misappropriation—that is, someone pretending to be indigenous, getting on the list and getting money that's supposed to be there for indigenous communities—should they have to pay back the money that they took? It's a simple yes-or-no answer. Should they have to pay the money back, yes or no?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** If a company is found to have breached contract provisions, that is an option for departments that have utilized that company.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** No. Should they have to pay the money back, yes or no?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** What I will say is—

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Is it yes or no?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —it is clear that the Conservatives want to get rid of this program.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Will you say yes or no? Should they have to pay the money back?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** This is something they do not want to do. They do not want to support indigenous—

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Should they have to pay the money back, yes or no, Minister?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —economic success. We should all be very clear—

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Is it yes or no, Minister?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —about the intentions of the Conservative Party.

**The Chair:** I'm going to pause it again here.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Is it yes or no, Minister?

**The Chair:** That's enough of the crosstalk. I'll give the minister the opportunity to answer this question. We are already over time, but I want to give her the opportunity to answer that.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Is it yes or no?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** If contracts have been breached, departments have the ability to take appropriate action.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Chair, I have a point of order.

There are clearly established rules about the obligation of witnesses at committees to answer questions. Those rules apply to ministers. It's not like in question period where the Speaker doesn't enforce rules around the content of the answers. There is a requirement, and it is a matter of parliamentary privilege that witnesses have to answer the questions that are asked.

I've been through two rounds, and the minister hasn't answered a single question I've asked. Quite specifically, in the last round, I put a simple question to the minister.

It doesn't matter if it's a minister or someone else. I would ask you to call our witnesses to order and expect them to provide answers to the questions that are being asked.

**Mr. Ben Carr:** Mr. Chair, I wish to speak.

**The Chair:** I have Mr. Carr on the same point of order.

**Mr. Ben Carr:** I respect my colleague and his point of view, but as we've said many times before, receiving the response that you want and receiving a response are two different things. Hopefully, you will take that into consideration as you reply to my colleague across the way.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Just on that, I won't tease Mr. Carr too much about being a new member. I know he's earnestly throwing himself into things here. However, the rules do establish that, at committees, there is a requirement to provide answers. It doesn't mean I have to like the answer, but there has to be an answer to the question. You can't just talk after the other person talks and talk about things that are totally unrelated. Those are the rules.

**The Chair:** I see Ms. Idlout also has her hand up.

I'll turn the floor over to Ms. Idlout.

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you.

We would like to add to this topic, because we are not getting the answers to the questions we are asking. I also put a question to Minister Vandal, but I didn't get an answer.

With Minister Hajdu, I want to say that I want to support the member who just spoke. The chair should enforce the rule that the minister should answer the questions.

• (1700)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Idlout.

My view is that the ministers have provided answers to the questions. I know they might not be satisfactory to members here, but ministers have been answering questions. I would add that they were also interrupted before they were able to get to the conclusion of many of those answers.

I would ask ministers to continue to answer and respond directly to the substance of the questions members are asking them. I'll leave it at that right now.

With that, we're moving into our second round of questions. I have Mr. McLeod for five minutes.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the presenters. It's always a very interesting discussion when ministers join us.

Most of you know that I've been advocating for indigenous rights my whole life and trying to make sure that our indigenous people have a better quality of life. The reason I got involved in politics was the extreme poverty that I witnessed as I grew up in the small indigenous communities in the north. I listened to our elders speak about signing treaties and signing the scrip so that we could coexist. However, what was in the agreements was not honoured or not carried out.

We have seen, right across the Northwest Territories, people working toward signing modern treaties. These treaties are intended to provide clarity. In the Northwest Territories, we have 15 tables where people are discussing different issues. Hopefully, we're going to come to a point where everybody will come to an agreement.

The Prime Minister was very clear in 2015 that we would be moving forward in a nation-to-nation type of arrangement. However, there are still some policies that are old and that do not fit. Some of them irritate me quite a bit. The comprehensive claim is the one that I think we need to pay some attention to and see if there's a way to replace it.

I want to ask Gary Anandasangaree a question about where things are, what kind of work is being done by him and the department, his office, to advance recognition of rights in Northwest Territories. We heard what is going on in B.C. It seemed to work for them. We're very keen to see if that's something that could be considered in the Northwest Territories. Also, could he give us an update on what he's doing to resolve some of the outstanding land claims and self-government negotiations that are happening?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Thank you, Mike, for that question and those comments.

It was really good to be at the table with the NWT premier, as well as the partners from NWT, several weeks ago. I think you were there as well. We had a comprehensive discussion on a range of issues, especially relating to modern treaty holders. Through them, we have been able to introduce legislation, Bill C-77, on the commissioner for modern treaty implementation. I believe there is progress being made.

We are in discussions on issues, such as education with the Tłı̨ch̓ government, that are going to be critical for self-determination over issues such as education. The challenge is that we have not been able to land and complete a treaty in recent years. Much work has been done over the years, but there are still elements that we need to complete.

I want to underscore and say again for the record that the comprehensive land claims policy is not something that we are currently implementing. It is a very different conversation when we talk about modern treaties right now. We've moved away from that, and we are in an era where we are at RIRSD tables, where rights recognition is a cornerstone

I want Ms. Gideon to have a chance to add to that in terms of the comprehensive land claims policy, because I have said it on a number of occasions and maybe we have not been very understanding of each other.

I'll ask Val to add some light to this.

• (1705)

**Ms. Valerie Gideon (Deputy Minister, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs):** I was just going to say—

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** Mr. Chair, I have one more question, so I'm just going to jump into it.

First of all, I want to say, if we're not implementing the comprehensive claim policy, get rid of it. Why keep it if it's no good? We're not implementing it because it's no good.

I want to ask one more question about the historic levels of funding that we've been receiving over the last few years for housing, for governance and for a number of different things. They're not long-term commitments. We're going to come to an end of some of these funding cycles. What are the plans for the next steps?

We don't have reserves, so—

**The Chair:** Give a very brief answer.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Look at budget 2021 and budget 2022. You're right. Significant money has flowed towards infrastructure and housing. For the urban, rural and northern housing, \$4 billion will be distributed in short order, and there is direct money that will be going to the territories, including NWT, and modern treaty partners. We look forward to that significant level of funding. It will enable additional housing to be built.

One of the challenges in NWT that we have heard about, frankly, is climate change. The barges are unable to move, for example, to bring equipment and products to the construction. However, the commitment—

**The Chair:** Minister, I'm sorry. I'm going to have to cut you off there. We're well over time, as much as I'd love to hear your answer. I'm sure many others would as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lemire, you now have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Pseudo-indigenous people, or pretendians in English, are non-indigenous people who falsely claim indigenous ancestry or identity to take advantage of it for personal gain. What are you going to do about this?

You've got the situation of the Algonquins of Ontario. The Chalk River project was socially sanctioned despite objections from nearly every Algonquin and Anishinabe nation.

There's the Métis of Ontario and the Métis National Council who lost their *raison d'être* with the scrapping of Bill C-53, but continue to receive federal funding.

The federal government awards contracts to companies that falsely claim to be indigenous. Canadian Heritage provides grants for indigenous cultural events organized by non-indigenous artists.

Academics and civil servants occupy positions designated for indigenous people, but no one has looked into whether they really are indigenous or not.

There are pretendians serving as an insurance policy in consultations conducted by the nuclear, gas and oil industries, and many other companies.

How far will things go? Will we finally see the end of it? Are you finally going to put your foot down? What's going on?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Thank you for your question, Mr. Lemire.

[*English*]

Look, it has been a challenge.

There have been a number of areas where the issue of identity or indigeneity has come up. From a departmental perspective, we have section 35 rights holders. They are recognized by the Constitution, but there is a process to attain that recognition. It's a very diligent process. Sometimes it's very frustrating for the people going through this process. However, we have not taken any shortcuts in order to ensure that the integrity of that recognition is sacrosanct. It's not something that can be compromised. At every step of the way.... Section 35 rights holders are those who are already recognized.

The groups you identified are not section 35 rights holders. We do, however, fund organizations, entities or collectives that are asserting section 35 rights for the purpose of ensuring they are able to ascertain or explore that right. I think it is in our best interest to continue doing that, because it is important. If their assertions are correct, we don't want to be disadvantaging them in the long term.

During COVID, we took some exceptional steps to ensure we didn't leave anyone behind. Post-COVID, we have been very diligent in terms of ensuring that only those with section 35 rights are able to exercise that identity.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Lemire.

[*English*]

Next, we're going to Ms. Idlout for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you, Chairperson.

If I can, I'll continue on from my last comments and questions.

There's a difference between wanting an answer and just being told an answer. I'll give you this as an example. If I ask, "What's one plus one?", what's the answer? The right answer would be two, but the answers we are getting are just numbers. They're just talking about the topic and not really answering the question. That's my first comment.

I want to tell these ministers, while they're listening, that we, as indigenous people, want to work toward reconciliation, but they're not working toward reconciliation. There are three items. The first two are funding and rights, and the third is having relations. For example, when there's an agreement with indigenous peoples, these are not enough. We've just heard that first nations are not happy. If it were to be signed, it would break our rights because they are not following the steps they need to be following.

As ministers, when you need to provide an answer, it leads us to frustration when we're not getting the answers. How are you going to answer these questions? Through this standing committee, we are trying to work together. How can we work together if you are not answering our questions properly?

**The Chair:** We are over the time, but I want to get a very brief answer to the question that Ms. Idlout had for Mr. Vandal.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** With all due respect to MP Idlout, I reject the premise of that question. I think our government has worked nation to nation since 2015. We've done some really hard things. We haven't been perfect, but incredible progress has been made on any number of issues, including co-developed legislation, removing boil water advisories and bringing forward C-92 on indigenous child welfare.

I've been to many meetings where we sat with Inuit leadership for hours. Many ministers were present, including the Prime Minister, listening to priorities, and we're going to continue to do that.

• (1715)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Idlout.

Next, we're going to move to Mr. Melillo for five minutes.

**Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the ministers for being here for this discussion.

It has been mentioned already, Minister Vandal, that you will not be re-offering in the next election. I just want to say—and I believe I speak on behalf of everyone here at the committee—we are really going to miss your interactions with Mr. Zimmer. I wanted to make sure I got that on the record. There's never a dull moment.

For my questions, I want to turn to my northern Ontario neighbour, Minister Hajdu.

Minister, I want to ask you about policing specifically.

Recently, the Province of Alberta and National Chief Woodhouse put out a joint statement calling on the government to declare first nations police services as essential services. That's something the Province of Alberta is looking to move toward, which I think is a great step. This is something I believe is vitally important for first nations, especially, frankly, after nine years of your government, during which we have seen crime increasing. We have seen over-

doses and overdose deaths unfortunately increasing. All of these challenges are happening right across the country and, unfortunately, first nations are also not immune to those challenges. It speaks to the need for more policing and more resources for first nations policing.

Your government promised, I believe two years ago, that this would be a promise fulfilled, and we have seen very little action to date on that. Can you speak to why your government is dragging its feet on something as essential as first nations policing?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Thank you very much.

Through the chair, I hope the member has had an opportunity to visit the many communities in his riding in order to see how incredible they are. He's right. Remote communities are challenged with policing, health care and infrastructure. That's why Minister LeBlanc is seized with the work of co-developing a framework with first nations.

You are a member of this committee. You know that co-development work is careful work, and it is listening work. Minister LeBlanc is doing that as we speak.

I will also say that, through the department, I have had the opportunity to be with.... We also support communities on crime prevention through something called the pathways program. This attempts to meet communities where they're at, in terms of reducing the need—

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** Thank you, Minister.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —for enforcement and working on building up protective features in communities that can lead to reduced crime and social crises.

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that. I'm sure you can appreciate that I have little time here.

I want to ask you this: You mentioned Minister LeBlanc and the work he is doing. From a first nations policing angle specifically, can you speak about what work you have been doing with the minister to advance that?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Certainly, as you know, I have had many meetings, including visiting many communities in northern Ontario and across the country. Policing comes up. We diligently make sure that the information shared with me is shared across the government. I have certainly been supporting Minister LeBlanc in the work he is doing with the AFN and other partners.

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** Thank you very much.

I'd like to ask you this, specifically: Two first nations in my riding announced over the summer that they were going to withdraw from the Treaty Three Police Service. They cited that they did not feel the service was adequate. I know Treaty Three Police has remarkable people working in their organization. I know they are also under-resourced, which is, I believe, the direct cause of why we saw those two communities pull out.

I also heard, through meetings with Treaty Three Police, that it's not necessarily just about a lack of funding. It's also about restrictions on funding. For example, they will sometimes receive funding from the government, but only for a specific thing, such as a police cruiser. That might not be something that is actually needed. One of the major constraints is, frankly, your government being overbearing and dictating to police departments what they can and cannot spend their funding on.

Are you moving to address this and ensure first nations police services have the freedom to allocate funding as they see fit?

• (1720)

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Thank you.

I think Treaty Three Police Service is a good example of a tripartite approach to policing. As you know, the federal government funds a portion of policing, and the province funds a portion of policing. In some cases, it's expected to provide those policing services. Obviously, some communities go without in the province of Ontario, as a result of, I would say, continued discrimination in access to services for first nations people in remote communities. We will continue to work with first nations, provinces and policy experts to make sure that whatever we co-develop will be through the lens of self-determination.

I'm glad to hear you speak about that, because it's the foundation of Bill C-61, the water legislation—as you know. It's about restoring self-determination so first nations communities have programs they are in control of that meet their needs. Therefore, I'll look forward to your advocacy at the provincial level as well. I know you know many of those people.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Melillo.

We are now moving to our last questioner in the third round, which will be our last round.

Mr. Carr, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Ben Carr:** Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

My first question will be for Minister Hajdu.

Minister, I was quite blessed to enjoy a career as an educator—as a teacher, a coach and a principal. During that time, I was able to work alongside many kids and their families. In particular, I worked with many indigenous families in the northwest part of the city of Winnipeg. Unfortunately, for many of those families and others, a variety of reasons we understand quite well—intergenerational trauma, the poverty that comes from that and other substantial socio-economic issues—made it challenging for a lot of those kids to find success, relative to their peers.

In Winnipeg, just a couple of weeks ago, Minister Vandal and I, alongside others, joined Minister Sudds and Minister Freeland to make an announcement of \$17.3 million, which will add on to a contribution the provincial government in Manitoba already made for a school food program. It is the second province in the country, in addition to Newfoundland and Labrador, to do so. Winnipeg has one of the largest urban indigenous populations in the country, I believe. It's about 100,000 plus in our municipality.

Can you speak generally, Minister, about the importance of programs like this and give us your perspective and perhaps concern when you hear individuals, such as the Leader of the Opposition, refer to these critically important social programs as nothing more than mere bureaucracy?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** What a fantastic question. I think the big difference between Liberal policy and Conservative policy, to my mind, is that Conservatives don't understand that in order to actually fight crime, you have to prevent crime. You prevent crime by building up communities. You prevent crime by making sure that people have access to quality education and their bellies are full while you do it. You prevent crime by making sure that people feel like they, too, and their children, have a fair chance to succeed.

These guys want to focus on putting everybody in jail. I can tell you that there aren't enough jail spaces available to deal with the issues that you're raising, actually, as an educator. When children go to school hungry, when they're not well supported, when families don't have what they need to be able to help their children thrive, we all pay—and we pay a big price. It's not just crime, as you know. It's very expensive to leave people neglected in our communities.

This is the fundamental difference between Conservative politicians and Liberal politicians. We believe in our communities, and we believe in the possibility of our communities. That's why the school food program is so important.

**Mr. Ben Carr:** Thanks very much, Minister. I did happen to catch on my left, while you were answering, a comment from a colleague across the way: Why are they hungry? Well, they're hungry because generations' worth of policies on the part of previous governments, both Liberal and Conservative alike, have contributed to detrimental conditions for indigenous peoples, and we continue to live with those realities.

However, having said that, take into account some of the other substantial policy investments that we have made. For example, when it comes to the Canada child benefit, we've said this to families: Hey, do you know what we're going to do? We're actually going to scale this to income, because we recognize that people who have a household combined income of \$500,000 a year and two kids don't need the same help that perhaps a single mother or father living in the centre or northwest part of Winnipeg needs.

When we combine the ecosystem with those types of investments, in addition to the foundation we're laying with the school food program and a variety of other steps that we've made, inclusive of that \$650-million health care transfer to the Province of Manitoba—in partnership with a government in Manitoba that, I think, we haven't seen over the course of the past decade while there was a Conservative government that decimated the education and health care system in Manitoba—I think that we're finally starting to move in the right direction.

Because it will be perhaps my last opportunity to speak with Minister Vandal, I just quickly would like him to address Churchill, Manitoba. This is near and dear, of course, to many in Manitoba, but part of the reason that it's very dear to me is that my late father spent much of his time as a minister in this government working to advance the interests of the people of Churchill and the town of Churchill.

Minister, very quickly, can you just give us a lay of the land in terms of how those investments that we've made over the years are allowing the town of Churchill to succeed, and where you suspect we're going to be moving forward in order to help build on that foundation?

Thank you.

• (1725)

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** That's a great question. Since 2016, our government's invested well over \$300 million to bring back the port of Churchill, which was nearly shuttered by the time Stephen Harper left office. We've invested, \$300 million later, with Arctic Gateway Group, the indigenous owners of Churchill. The good news is that we now have a provincial government that is eager and willing to partner with us to invest for the good people of Churchill and for all the many first nations people down the rail line that leads to Churchill.

I know there's going to be good news coming in the not-too-distant future.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Chair, I have a point of order I'd like raise.

Yes, Chair, I have a question of privilege I'd like to put before you. As I mentioned earlier, we had an instance today where ministers were asked direct questions by multiple different members of

the opposition. They refused to answer some; they prevaricated in response to others. I believe you will find that this is a matter touching on the privileges of members. If you so find, I'm prepared to move the appropriate motion.

Witnesses are not allowed to just refuse to answer direct questions. Whether they are ministers or other witnesses, that is the rule of the process—hence, the question of privilege. I look forward to your ruling on that.

**The Chair:** I'm just going to pause for one second here.

• (1725)

(Pause)

• (1725)

**The Chair:** I appreciate the question that was brought forward by Mr. Genuis. It's something I want to take some time to think about. I will report back to the committee at our next meeting, after I've had a chance to think about this and review the blues of the meeting today. I will come back to the committee with a decision on that, and we'll be able to move forward from that point.

I do want to thank the ministers and witnesses for being here today for two hours answering questions.

Before excusing members, I just want to mention that a lot of members have asked for an extension on the amendments to be provided. We're going to extend that until midnight tomorrow. Make sure that you submit any of your amendments in writing before that point, so we're able to have that tabulated and put in a place so that we can start clause-by-clause consideration on Thursday morning.

With that, is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed:

**The Chair:** The meeting is adjourned.







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