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Chair: Mr. Patrick Weiler



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• (1605)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting 136 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

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

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, February 1, 2022, and the order of reference of Tuesday, November 19, 2024, the committee is resuming its study of the barriers to indigenous economic development.

I want to welcome our witnesses for the first panel. We have the Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Public Services and Procurement, and the Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Indigenous Services.

They are joined by officials from the Department of Indigenous Services, including Gina Wilson, deputy minister; Keith Conn, assistant deputy minister; and from lands and economic development, Jessica Sultan, director general, economic policy development.

From the Department of Public Works and Government Services, we have Arianne Reza, the deputy minister, and Catherine Poulin, assistant deputy minister, departmental oversight branch.

Ministers, welcome. You will each have 10 minutes for your opening statements, after which we will proceed to the rounds of questions.

We start with Minister Duclos.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement): I thought you would start with the best one and then have me, the other one, after that, but that is your choice, Chair. You are the decision-maker.

[Translation]

I'll start by thanking you for inviting Minister Hajdu and me to discuss the important issue of indigenous procurement.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we are meeting is the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe peoples.

With me today are two senior officials from Public Services and Procurement Canada, or PSPC: Deputy Minister Arianne Reza, and Assistant Deputy Minister Catherine Poulin of the Corporate Oversight Branch.

The Government of Canada obviously recognizes the negative and ongoing impact of colonization on the self-determination and independence, economic and otherwise, of indigenous peoples.

My department, PSPC, participates in the reconciliation effort with indigenous peoples and helps indigenous companies and entrepreneurs be fully involved in the Government of Canada's procurement process.

For many years now, the procurement strategy for indigenous business program has been an important tool used by the government to promote reconciliation and economic independence.

Here are some of our tangible results.

The first is PSPC's work with indigenous peoples to include indigenous themes, arts and materials into parliamentary precinct projects, such as the Centre Block, the new Parliament Welcome Centre and the redevelopment of Block 2 of the parliamentary precinct.

[English]

The future aircrew training program, which is a \$1.7-billion initiative to modernize pilot and aircrew training for the Royal Canadian Air Force, includes a clear commitment to dedicate at least 5% of the contract value to creating professional and skilled employment opportunities for indigenous workers, from apprenticeships to executive roles.

The new Canadian dental care plan, with a three-year partnership between Sun Life and the Tribal Wi-Chi-Way-Win Capital Corporation, will create more than 175 jobs in Winnipeg. To achieve this, the government relies on the indigenous business directory to administer the strategy, and I know that Indigenous Services Canada is working very well and very strongly with its partners and exploring new ways to improve the registration and validation processes.

In the last year the government has taken firm action to protect the integrity of that important federal procurement system from the effects of bad actors. The process of addressing fraudulent cases must be free of any political interference. That is why, at PSPC, we created the Office of Supplier Integrity and Compliance, or OSIC: to enhance the department's capacity to respond to instances of supplier wrongdoing.

OSIC is acting independently from political interference and has already ruled against cases in which there were concerns of wrongdoing.

We also introduced the new ineligibility and suspension policy to provide OSIC with a range of actions on the much broader scope of misconduct. For example, suppliers who violate the integrity of the procurement process can be suspended and debarred, even without a criminal charge or conviction.

Mr. Chair, the process by which concerns are assessed by OSIC can happen in two ways. First, departments and agencies can come forward with concerns about wrongdoing; second, OSIC can also initiate an assessment itself, based on information provided by a trusted source.

In either case, Mr. Chair, it is critical that PSPC be made aware of wrongdoing as soon as possible so that steps can be taken to rectify the situation. I can tell you that officials at my department are actively engaged with other federal organizations to ensure that instances of supplier misconduct are promptly referred to OSIC.

In closing, Mr. Chair, PSPC will continue to use the government's buying power to help advance economic reconciliation. Canada's prosperity cannot afford to exclude the diverse range of skills and experience that indigenous businesses and people contribute. To realize this potential, we must also safeguard the integrity of Canada's federal procurement system and ensure value for money.

Thank you. I will eventually be very happy to answer the committee's questions.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Duclos.

With that, we'll move on to our next witness, the Honourable Patty Hajdu.

You have 10 minutes or less for your opening remarks.

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

My colleague has left off at a great place, because my role here today is to highlight the importance of fostering strong indigenous economic opportunities through programs like the PSIB, the procurement strategy for indigenous business.

For decades, indigenous peoples were intentionally excluded from opportunities to develop local economies and participate more broadly in the national economy. The short-sighted policies of previous governments meant that, whether intentional or as a consequence of exclusionary policy, indigenous businesses and economies have been held back. However, that is short-sighted for indigenous peoples and communities and for Canada's economy alike. Supporting indigenous entrepreneurs, who are job creators, or making access to capital available for major projects is good for people, communities and Canada's overall economy.

Investing in indigenous communities and building up indigenous businesses and entrepreneurs benefit all Canadians. According to the 2022 "National Indigenous Economic Strategy for Canada", the continued exclusion of indigenous peoples costs the Canadian

economy \$27.7 billion every year. The National Indigenous Economic Development Board found that closing the existing employment gap could help lift over 150,000 indigenous people out of poverty. There is a real cost to inaction.

Indigenous people are an untapped resource in Canada's market. Since 2015, we've been focused on strengthening self-determination and building capacity so that indigenous peoples have the tools and resources to fully participate in the economy on their own terms. Federal funding for programs like the aboriginal entrepreneurship program managed by the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association and Métis capital corporations is creating opportunities for first nations, Inuit and Métis business owners to launch or grow their businesses.

Indigenous financial institutions have existed since the late 1980s. Over the past 35 years, the program has issued approximately 52,000 business loans worth \$3.2 billion, with a repayment rate of over 95%. For every \$1 million lent by indigenous financial institutions, \$3.6 million is produced in total gross domestic product, GDP, for Canada. Successive governments have recognized that access to capital is key to economic reconciliation, and the results of these investments can be seen in communities across the country.

For example, Ulnooweg Development Group Inc., the indigenous financial institution for the Atlantic, has played a key role in supporting indigenous entrepreneurs. To date, it's funded over 1,900 projects worth over \$71 million. This funding has supported entrepreneurs in the fishing, aquaculture and marine servicing industries, creating a strong first nations-led industry in the region and boosting the local economy.

Investing in indigenous communities and building up indigenous businesses and entrepreneurs benefit all regions in our country. It's why budget 2024 announced \$319.8 million over five years to provide much-needed additional capital for indigenous financial institutions and Métis capital corporations to support the growing needs of entrepreneurs.

While investing in indigenous business is important, it starts with a strong base. Building up communities with new or renovated schools, health care centres, water treatment plants, all-season roads and housing is investing in Canada's productivity and economy overall. A recent report from the AFN found that every dollar invested in infrastructure generates \$1.82 in economic output for first nations communities. Since 2015, we've increased funding for education, health, infrastructure and housing by over 1,100%.

We're working with partners on community-led solutions, and we're making progress. For example, to close the housing gap, we've supported 5,300 housing projects in 611 first nations communities since April 2016. More kindergarten to grade 12 schools are being built so that children can access high-quality education without leaving home, including in communities like Tataskweyak Cree Nation in northern Manitoba, Eabametoong First Nation in northern Ontario and Piikani Nation in Alberta.

Strong communities produce strong community members, who in turn are the leaders who will shape the decades to come.

Procurement is another key part of building the indigenous economy. The national indigenous economic strategy, which was developed by over 20 indigenous organizations, sees procurement as a key component of accessing financial capital so that indigenous peoples can achieve economic and social prosperity on their own terms.

The strategy also recommends that all levels of government and industry have mandatory indigenous procurement targets. In 2021, the federal government implemented a 5% indigenous procurement target set for all departments. Tabatha Bull—some of you have heard from her—the CEO of the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business, called it “a pivotal moment in harnessing the potential of the Indigenous economy”.

• (1615)

Since then, the value of contracts going to indigenous businesses has increased to approximately \$1.6 billion, and there are tangible economic benefits to companies that for the first time have the Government of Canada as their customer. From experience to system navigation to growth of opportunity, government procurement could be a valuable component in the sales trajectory of an indigenous company.

Now that we're seeing success in bringing indigenous companies into the sphere of government procurement, the federal government is working with partners to transform the procurement strategy. It's clear that this program must be transformed and transferred to the control of partners. To do so respects the principle of self-determination, and it responds to the calls from indigenous leaders themselves.

Central to advancing self-determination and economic reconciliation is ensuring that indigenous peoples participate in and shape the decisions that deeply affect them. It's why I convened with the private sector, indigenous leadership and other government departments two economic reconciliation roundtables to date—and others are planned for 2025—to identify and create solutions to government and corporate barriers to indigenous economic activity. We're using that information as we work with partners on a renewed federal economic policy to support first nations, Inuit and Métis economic development.

I can see by the focus of the members in this committee that we agree that the federal government has a real opportunity and a role to foster indigenous economic prosperity, including by safeguarding the 5% minimum target and the procurement strategy for indigenous businesses. Programs that increase economic activity across Canada are just common sense.

The continued exclusion of indigenous people from the economy costs the Canadian economy, as I said before, \$27.7 billion every year, so we can't afford to ignore opportunities to build up this economy. By working together to remove barriers to economic development and to support indigenous businesses, we are making progress towards long-term well-being and prosperity in communities across Canada.

I look forward to answering your questions and further discussing the importance of economic reconciliation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

That concludes the opening remarks.

We'll move into our first round of questions, the six-minute round, starting with the Conservative Party and Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Minister Hajdu, a former auditor for the indigenous procurement program has stated that your Liberal government was warned about specific cases of alleged fraud.

He said that the government hamstrung auditors and repeatedly ignored warnings that the program was being abused by non-indigenous companies.

Why did you ignore the auditor's warnings?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Well, first of all, I was deeply concerned this weekend to hear of this. It was the first I'd heard of this allegation. I took immediate action with the department, and I am calling for a full external audit of the program.

Mr. Michael Barrett: A full external audit.... In the case that's been outlined in the remarks of the former auditor, we see that having the government check its own work is not actually oversight. Are you able to tell us at whose direction Indigenous Services Canada determined that the department would take on full responsibility for confirming the eligibility of indigenous businesses for the program after 2021?

• (1620)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Well, first of all, I just want to thank you for the question. It's clear by your question that we agree that a 5% procurement target is important and that we need to ensure any program like this has integrity, so I appreciate the question. I agree with you that if we don't have integrity of this program, we're not going to be able to satisfy not just Canadians but indigenous people that a program like this is actually working toward their goals.

What I can say is that the company that was contracted by Indigenous Services Canada to do this work has made these allegations. They're very serious. As I said, I'm extremely concerned. I found out about these concerns this weekend and took immediate action to call for an external audit. The department is working now on what that will look like and will come back to me with a plan.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Minister, is it your belief today that the program has integrity?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: It is my belief that there are many aspects of the program that are delivering for indigenous companies, but any misuse of the program puts the program at risk. For me, an allegation like the one that the auditor has made is very serious. I think we should all take it seriously and we should act on it.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Minister Duclos, were you aware of Randy Boissonnault's claims of indigenous heritage that were echoed and promoted by the Liberal Party of Canada, both in their social media and in fundraising efforts? Were you aware that he had made those claims?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Like you, I follow the news and listen to what our colleagues say. Actually, I may not do that as much as you, because you were at the committee together last week, and you heard Randy Boissonnault comment on these issues.

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett: The Liberal Party fundraised off a false claim. It was a lie that had been put forward. Now, if the lie was not.... Mr. Boissonnault claims it wasn't he who told the lie, in which case it would rest with the Liberal Party. They fundraised off it, and we've seen multiple instances now of the Liberal Party trying to cover this up. Media have continued to report more and more revelations that what Mr. Boissonnault says and what is true are often very different things.

Do you think Canadians should be concerned that the Liberal Party of Canada fundraised off what we now know to be a lie, which was that Mr. Boissonnault claimed to have indigenous heritage, and then his company used that same false claim in an attempt to disenfranchise indigenous-owned businesses and win contracts under that false pretense?

Mr. Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Carr has a point of order.

Mr. Ben Carr: Perhaps the record can show that I think we established quite clearly at the last meeting, when Mr. Boissonnault was present, that he did not claim indigenous—

Mr. Michael Barrett: That's not a point of order.

Mr. Ben Carr: —heritage, nor did he at any point. Perhaps my colleagues across the way, when making such insinuations, can be mindful of what the facts show.

Mr. Michael Barrett: On that point of order, Chair—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Carr.

On the point of order, I have Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Yes. As you well know, Mr. Carr's intervention is not a point of order. It does not reference any standing order. It's simply debate, in an attempt to interrupt the proceedings.

I was very respectful in my exchange in offering time to the ministers. What I'd ask is that Liberal members be equally respectful, even if they're trying to cover for shameful behaviour by the Liberal member for Edmonton, Randy Boissonnault, on his lies and false claims.

Mr. Ben Carr: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, the same point of order—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

We're quickly getting into debate here, Mr. Carr, but do you have a point of order that you're—

Mr. Ben Carr: Just very quickly on the same point of order, I believe Mr. Barrett began referencing shameful behaviour and other allegations—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Are we into the green book here, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Ben Carr: —which I don't think are actually points of order, just for reference.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Carr.

Let's get back to asking the questions. We're all here to hear the testimony of the ministers.

I'm going to turn the floor back to Mr. Barrett.

You have a little bit more than two minutes left. I had stopped the clock. I'll hand the floor back to you, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Before your Liberal colleague attempted to interfere to cover up for the shameful behaviour and lies of Liberal MP Randy Boissonnault with respect to his claims to indigenous heritage and to attempting to defraud indigenous-owned businesses of their ability to get government contracts and the Liberal Party of Canada promoting that lie in an attempt to raise funds off that false claim, Minister, do you think that this behaviour is appropriate and that Canadians should be concerned with the Liberal Party's actions in this case?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I'm not the chair of this committee, so I cannot determine whether MP Carr's intervention was a point of order, but what I know is that what he said was correct: Making false allegations and making all sorts of falsehoods sound true because they're all compiled together is not a fair treatment of the facts.

I would suggest again that you get back to what MP Boissonnault said to you just last week and that you ask him those questions if you think they are relevant and—

• (1625)

Mr. Michael Barrett: What we know to be true, Minister, is that every time Mr. Boissonnault came before a standing committee, what he said was later proven to be not true and that he has demonstrated himself to be someone who is not truthful or honest, so we can't refer to Mr. Boissonnault's testimony as to what is honest or right. What we know is that the facts are that the Liberal Party of Canada promoted a false claim about Randy Boissonnault's indigenous heritage.

This was my question for you. Your party, sir, the Liberal Party, fundraised off what we know to be not true, and Canadians are of course concerned about it. This type of dishonesty borders on corruption when Canadians don't know whether what the government has said is true or is not true.

Should Canadians be concerned with the actions of your party when we know that one of your former cabinet colleagues showed a pattern for dishonesty and lies, up to and including—

Mr. Ben Carr: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I think Mr. Barrett is an experienced—

The Chair: Mr. Carr has a point of order.

Mr. Ben Carr: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Barrett is an experienced parliamentarian. He knows that he can't refer to a member's behaviour as lying.

In fact, my Conservative colleagues across the way did this on multiple occasions at the last meeting, and in fact it was a Conservative chair who correctly ruled at that moment in time that it was unparliamentary language.

He should apologize and withdraw that comment.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): That's not what I said.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Carr.

We are getting to the end of the time.

Mr. Barrett had asked a question. I'm going to give the minister an opportunity.

Mr. Ben Carr: On a point of order, Mr. Chair—

Mr. Ben Carr: —when a member is referred to by another member as a liar, whether that's in the chamber or at committee, it requires a withdrawal and an apology. I think that you, as chair, should be giving an indication of what you expect in terms of the way that members comport themselves around the table.

I appreciate that we want to get to a further line of questioning, but when one member calls another a liar, that not only in and of itself delays the proceedings, forcing someone like me to raise a point of order, but further to that, it does require the chair to give an indication that there should be an apology and a withdrawal, or at the very least a withdrawal of the commentary.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I have Mr. Carr.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Carr.

I do want to remind members to ensure that you are using parliamentary language at all times. You'll note in Standing Order 18 that you're not to use disrespectful or offensive language, and I just want to remind members of this.

We don't want to get into this kind of behaviour in this committee. We want to be able to get the testimony that we're all seeking here and as the House indeed ordered us to do. I just want to remind members to do that and to not use disrespectful or offensive language in this committee.

We are at the end of the time, but I want to give Minister Duclos an opportunity to respond.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll just repeat in French what I said in English a few moments ago.

Compiling things that may seem true at a very high level, but that collectively turn out to be false, is not a good way to proceed.

I would suggest that committee members continue the discussion with the member in question if they want.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Barrett.

We're moving over to our second questioner in the first round of questions.

Mr. Carr, you have six minutes.

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

Minister Duclos, it's nice to see you. We haven't had the chance to hear from you often at this committee, but unfortunately I'm going to direct my questions to Minister Hajdu.

Minister, we've talked a lot, you and I, both here and outside of committee in my hometown of Winnipeg. We've talked specifically about the many ways in which we've progressed together with indigenous communities in Manitoba and across the country on the ambitions and the goals of realizing critical economic development and economic reconciliation.

I'm thinking specifically of projects like the downtown health care facility that's going to be built out of Portage Place. That wouldn't happen without millions of dollars of federal investments, which will be leveraged by first nations in my hometown of Winnipeg. I'm thinking about the Bay building, which is going to be turned into very important housing, and about other infrastructure that will support first nations in Manitoba.

I'm thinking about a national school food program, which, as a former educator myself, I believe to be critically important. I've been to several schools. Despite my colleagues in the opposition continuing to call it "bureaucracy" and levying accusations of no food having actually been served, I can tell you that this is not true: There is food being served in Manitoba schools as we speak. I've been to them. I've seen those kids eat that food. That's an important piece for first nations kids in Manitoba.

I'm thinking of Freedom Road, which, very early in the life of our government, was an incredibly important move of reconciliation, which certainly my colleague Mr. Melillo, I would hope, applauds, as it is something that benefits the community on both the Ontario and the Manitoba sides of the border. That has led to substantial economic development and has been a very important step in the direction of righting some of the egregious historical wrongs.

I'm thinking of the school building announcements you just made in Winnipeg a couple of days ago with many first nations communities. The better the education our kids have, the better their prospects of economic development.

With all of that, Minister, perhaps you can reflect more broadly about the ways in which—whether that's relative to Winnipeg, Manitoba or all of Canada—the Government of Canada, in the last nine years, has made positive steps towards ensuring that the economic well-being of first nations in Canada and economic reconciliation have been at the forefront of your decision-making.

Thank you.

● (1630)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Well, that's quite a list, actually. It's a short and partial list, and yet so important, because you're talking about what many people talk about: the social determinants of health. I would say that we should broaden that out and say the social determinants of wealth as well.

Shoal Lake is a perfect example, as is Freedom Road. I had an opportunity to go to Shoal Lake and used Freedom Road to get to Shoal Lake. When I got there.... The community is in a rejuvenation, actually, right now. There are many members who live in Winnipeg and who now are able to commute back and forth to the community and are providing services to the community in the form of leadership, health services and education services. In fact, their water treatment plant, which is also new and funded by the federal government, is actually fully run by Shoal Lake members and is maintained by Shoal Lake members.

I think what you're hitting on is that these investments that we've been making—I did mention the number in my speech, and it's 1,100% more than the previous Conservative government spent on indigenous priorities—are not just social investments. They actually contribute to stronger communities and to communities' ability to educate their kids at home, closer to home, and they have higher graduation rates. That creates more opportunities for young people to go to post-secondary education—college and university—and then oftentimes come back home to provide services and to continue to grow that community.

Thank you for mentioning the school announcement as well. That was such an exciting announcement. Many of those communities have had to continue to send their high-schoolers out of town. As you would know, being in Winnipeg—and maybe MP Melillo also knows these stories—it's really challenging for the kids who have to leave home to go to school in a city far away.

Mr. Ben Carr: Minister, I'm sure you could continue, but one of the things that it seems to me is of critical importance to economic reconciliation is making sure that water rights are respected, because, of course, when you have water rights, which therefore lead

to incredibly important water infrastructure, you can improve economic development.

I couldn't help but note that during the request for unanimous consent a couple of days ago in the House for this bill, which we spent countless hours debating and passing here at committee—Bill C-61 is the one I'm referring to—it was only Conservative members who refused to give unanimous consent to expedite it. What's the impact of a further delay on Bill C-61 going to be, as a result of Conservative behaviour, on the economic development future for first nations on reserve?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you for the question.

I know that all parties at this table worked really hard to amend the bill and make the bill even better, including the Conservative Party, which submitted successful amendments that were accepted.

I would probably just quote Chief Moonias, who is from Neskantaga First Nation, as you know, in MP Melillo's riding. He said this after that vote. He was actually very disappointed. He said:

We need you to act now.

We don't need perfection. We just need your best efforts.

He had more to say in the media as well about how long that community has suffered and how far they've come, and how this essential legislation is going to prevent Neskantaga from ever having to return to those days of being neglected and underfunded by a federal government.

● (1635)

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

I certainly hope that the—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Carr. Your time has elapsed.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lemire has the floor for six minutes.

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

Thank you for being here, Minister Duclos and Minister Hajdu.

Indigenous business leaders must have real and direct access to federal government procurement opportunities as equal partners, not as marginalized bystanders. Obviously, genuine indigenous people are the ones to talk to.

Do you want me to start over, Minister?

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I'm sorry. Let me make sure that I have the right translation.

That's fine. It's perfect. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Could you reset the clock for me, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes, you can start over.

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

Indigenous business leaders must have real and direct access to federal government procurement opportunities as equal partners, not as marginalized bystanders. Obviously, I'm talking about genuine indigenous businesses.

The priority must be to build capacity, streamline contracting processes and ensure an economic governance framework that puts them at the centre of the decision-making process, not at the periphery. If we want economic reconciliation to be more than just lip service, we must act now.

Currently, we get the impression that the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business, the CCIB, is overstepping its initial mandate by acting as a direct competitor to the five indigenous institutions mandated by the Assembly of First Nations, the AFN. I'm referring to the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association, the NACCA; the First Nations Finance Authority, the FNFA; the First Nations Financial Management Board, the FMB; the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers, CANDO; and AFOA Canada, the centre of excellence and innovation in indigenous management, finance and governance.

What's most concerning is that the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business is trying to take control of the indigenous business directory, a role that should rightfully belong to organizations led by and for first nations, Métis and Inuit.

This behaviour further undermines indigenous institutions and diverts resources that should rightfully be theirs. That's what this study is about.

Minister, when will you act to uphold the motion passed by the Assembly of First Nations and ensure the full economic independence of legitimate indigenous institutions led by and for rights holders?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: That's a good question.

That's the problem with reforming the program. There is no consensus on how to approach that.

We continue to engage with our partners. Our approach has to ensure that every organization has a voice. For example, the organizations that represent Inuit, Métis and first nations, respectively, are all different. There should be a different approach for each partner. We need to find a fair and equitable ways forward that our partners will approve of.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: In this case, it's about much more than having a voice; it's about leadership.

I'm wondering why the CCIB is part of the conversation. Why are we hearing that this organization is going to get \$5 million instead of companies recognized by the Assembly of First Nations?

Is the CCIB an indigenous organization led and mandated by first nations rights holders?

Who funds the CCIB? From what I hear, its funding comes directly from the big Bay Street firms—basically, white people whose business interests differ significantly from those of the first nations.

Who, if not you, can assure us that the CCIB's goals are entirely in the interest of first nations?

Is the CCIB an indigenous organization?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I don't agree with that perspective. The CCIB brings together indigenous, Métis and other members. The NACCA includes members of first nations and Métis societies.

I think there's a place for all of these organizations, and they have the opportunity and the responsibility to make this work a success.

• (1640)

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: You've said many times that there was going to be a memorandum to cabinet about requests from the NACCA, the FNFA and the FMB. That means the next budget will include measures to fund their requests.

We've heard that the requests you've received from these organizations are supported and documented, as you well know. However, in recent weeks, some organizations have had meetings with your office. Others attended the Liberal cocktail party with the Prime Minister. There were also discussions about this at the most recent meeting of the Assembly of First Nations. I actually attended the presentation you made at that event.

Now that it's pretty much mid-December, can we get a meaningful guarantee that Minister Freeland has officially been asked to guarantee funding for indigenous funding initiatives?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: My job was to write a letter to Minister Freeland about the budget expressing the—

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: It's mid-December. Was that letter written and sent to Minister Freeland?

When our topic is economic reconciliation, we expect your office to submit a brief.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: My department and I worked on the budget letter. I can't say much about the specifics of that letter or what it contains. However, I can assure you that part of the letter is about the economic reconciliation objective.

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

[English]

Next, we're going to go to Ms. Idlout for six minutes.

The floor is yours.

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Qujannamiik, Iksivautaq.*

Unfortunately, you get to hear directly from me, as the interpreter who is normally provided for me is not here. I think that the committee is working on ensuring that we have more resources other than one interpreter so that my language rights could be respected and so that I could ask my questions in Inuktitut, but I will proceed in English anyway.

I have questions similar to Sébastien's. He asked about the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business because I think we all have been led to this point by the vagueness of what we hear about who indigenous organization members are. I think, though, that we're all very clear that we know who indigenous rights holders are.

My question is for you, Patty. Do you believe that the CCIB qualifies as an indigenous organization led by rights holders, similar to the First Nations Financial Management Board, NACCA and the First Nations Finance Authority?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I'm really uncomfortable being in the position of determining whether an indigenous organization is a legitimate indigenous organization.

I can tell you that we have respect for the work that CCIB does and that many of the organizations it represents are indeed indigenous businesses. I can tell you that it's also a partner in helping the Government of Canada figure out the next steps to transform the approach to identifying and certifying indigenous businesses. I can also tell you that the sooner the Government of Canada gets out of the business of defining what an indigenous business is, the better.

However, it won't stop the questions. I think what indigenous people are saying is that they need to be able themselves to define who their people are, who their members are. This is a vestige and a continuation of a colonial country that has a number of different programs and approaches that are in the position of having to certify indigeneity. CCIB is one of the partners—not the only partner—that is working on the question of how best to transfer this role, and I think it is a very important role.

• (1645)

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Qujannamiik*. If I could just simplify my question, do you think that CCIB qualifies as an indigenous organization?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I think that it is an organization that has been providing an immense amount of service to many first nations and to other indigenous business providers, and I think that it has an important voice in the work that we're doing, but it's not the only voice.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Okay. You're clearly not going to answer my direct question, so I'm going to ask a different question.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, I think I did answer the question, so I'm not sure. Maybe I misunderstood your question.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Okay. If you could answer yes or no, does CCIB qualify as an indigenous organization?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: It is an indigenous organization that provides a service, along with others.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Thank you. You've answered my question.

I have another question, and I'm glad to see that Assistant Deputy Minister Keith Conn is here.

Since the Prime Minister highlighted in budget 2023 the need for economic reconciliation—terminology that I don't agree with, by the way—the indigenous economic council has been in collaboration with Indigenous Services Canada on recommendations to achieve this goal.

When do you anticipate these recommendations being brought to cabinet for discussion and decision?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: You can answer, but....

Go ahead.

Mr. Keith Conn (Assistant Deputy Minister, Lands and Economic Development, Department of Indigenous Services): Thanks for the question.

We're looking at some cabinet dates. We just haven't landed on a date yet, but certainly it's in our line of sight.

Ms. Lori Idlout: This was based on budget 2023 proposals. Could you explain to us why there has been a delay?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: The questions around cabinet process and dates seem to me to fall under cabinet confidence, but I can tell you that we're working with partners, and we want to make sure that what we bring to cabinet is going to truly reflect the needs that indigenous partners are saying must be included in a renewed economic reconciliation strategy.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Thank you.

My next question is for Minister Duclos.

As you are the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, I'm wondering about how you work with Indigenous Services Canada on indigenous procurement. How do you operate to make sure that indigenous procurement meets the minimum 5% that we all know is the target?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Let me first say that I will work with you to see, with the translation bureau, how we can always support the needs you have legitimately expressed earlier. We recognize that speaking in our preferred language is always better when it comes to providing a voice to those people whom we have the fortune and the responsibility to represent.

Second, I am closely working with Minister Hajdu in many different ways. When it comes to the indigenous business directory, we're supportive of their work in the development of guidance on how it can support the broader indigenous procurement strategy, because there is obviously a key link between the directory and the strategy.

We are also working with them to coordinate outreach and to raise awareness to indigenous businesses so that they can fully participate in the federal government's procurement. That comes with coordinating the standing offers and the supply arrangements that can stimulate indigenous business development.

We are also working with Indigenous Services Canada to draft and update contract clauses, based on ISC's guidance.

Finally, we are working together to identify, reduce and sometimes eliminate barriers to federal procurement activities that are hitting indigenous businesses and workers.

I will end by saying, as Minister Hajdu said—and as you at every opportunity also support—that reconciliation comes with the recognition that for too many years colonialism has created those barriers and those gaps. That creates social and economic costs, obviously, but also broader costs for Canada, which we always should recognize and try to reduce as much as possible.

• (1650)

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

That completes the first round of questions.

We're moving into the second round of five minutes, starting with Mr. Genuis.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): The Globe and Mail has a shocking story today about abuse of the indigenous procurement program by the Canadian Health Care Agency. According to a whistle-blower, the government was putting in place tight constraints on the work of auditors as soon as they started to identify serious problems. The government was warned by auditors, and their response to those warnings was to make life more difficult for the auditors.

Minister, you told my colleague Michael Barrett that you only heard about allegations against the Canadian Health Care Agency this weekend. Is that correct?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: No, I did not. I told your colleague that I was made aware of the auditors' overall concerns about the program this weekend and that it was deeply distressing to me, and that I—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You were previously aware of his allegations against the Canadian Health Care Agency.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: What I'm saying is that this was the first time I heard of Mr. Hartle's allegations.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: When did you first become aware of concerns about the indigeneity of this partnership involving the Canadian Health Care Agency? When did you first become aware of that?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: The department routinely reviews, as you've heard before—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: When did you first become aware? It's not about the department. When did you first become aware?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: As I said, this weekend, I too heard about what was in The Globe and Mail, and I was deeply concerned.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: However, when did you first become aware of concerns about the Canadian Health Care Agency?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I think you've asked questions about this company before, have you not?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: When did you first become aware of it, though?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: The first time I became aware of it was.... I don't have an exact date, but it was a few months ago.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It was a few months ago.

Minister, you said in response to my questions, "I would say that it was an abuse of being on the list without adequate representation." You said this about the Canadian Health Care Agency back at the end of October, and you have tried to represent the facts in a very different way to my colleague Mr. Barrett, which is disappointing, to say the least.

The AFN has said that—

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Well, wait a minute, Mr. Chair. Could I respond to that? That is actually putting words in my mouth, and that is not what I said.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Can I have the time, Mr. Chair? I have another question.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, you do have the time, and the minister will have an opportunity to respond to that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, sir.

Okay, I have three minutes left.

The AFN says that you're not hitting your 5% target. It's closer to 1%. That's what Chief Joanna Bernard told the government operations committee. Is the AFN correct?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: It's not, according to our records, but what I can say is that I understand the concern. I'm actually, as I said to your colleague, glad that the Conservative Party is fighting so hard to protect this 5% procurement target. This is good news. It means that we all want this program to work better, including the AFN, and the AFN has—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You're not answering my question, and you were somewhat inaccurate in your response to Mr. Barrett.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I did answer your question, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You don't agree with the AFN. I understand.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I would say that our data is different from the AFN's and that in some departments we are exceeding the procurement target of 5%.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Well, either you're hitting it or you're not. It's not as if the AFN is experiencing things differently, right? Either you're hitting the 1% or you're hitting the 5%.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Well, what I would say is that our data demonstrates that we are actually hitting our procurement target in a number of different departments.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Your data also shows, Madam Minister, that you're dramatically purging the indigenous business list, that you have taken over 1,000 companies off that list since 2022. You've taken over 100 companies off this year alone.

I'm trying to square the fact that on the one hand, not a single person or company has been penalized for indigenous identity fraud, but that on the other hand, you're dramatically purging the list, which suggests that there are some people on that list who shouldn't be on that list.

How do you square the fact that indigenous leaders across the board are saying that abuse of this program is rampant? You're taking many companies off the list, yet nobody has been held accountable for indigenous identity fraud.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Well, actually, what I would say is that indigenous peoples are saying that economic reconciliation and the work of the Government of Canada in terms of its procurement target is actually changing realities for indigenous businesses across the country.

However, I would say that I agree with you, Mr.—

• (1655)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm sorry, Minister, but could you just answer the question? Is it acceptable that nobody has been held accountable for indigenous identity fraud by your government?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: What I would say is that it's great that you care about this program to the degree that you do, because what we all agree about, Mr. Genuis—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Did you answer the question? Is it acceptable to you that nobody has been held accountable?

Mr. Ben Carr: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I can't answer the question, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead on your point of order, Mr. Carr.

Mr. Ben Carr: It's just a problem we've run into previously. It's very difficult for us to have translation services provided adequately when there's talking back and forth, so perhaps we could just re-settle things.

Thank you.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On the same point of order, I agree with Mr. Carr. I'm trying to ask questions and the minister is not answering them and, I think, should be brought to order.

I have 30 seconds left, and I'd just like to know whether she thinks it's acceptable—

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, before you do that, I want to remind members here not to talk over the witnesses. We want to make sure that we're avoiding crosstalk. It makes it very difficult for the interpreters to do their work and for members who have challenges in hearing as well. I want to remind members to do that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ben Carr: I was indeed hearing two voices at the same time, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: With that, Mr. Genuis, you have about 30 seconds.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

In those 30 seconds, I'll try one more time, Minister.

Nobody has been held accountable by your government for indigenous identity fraud. Meanwhile, you've taken the Canadian Health Care Agency off the list, and you can't tell me why. You've taken Dalian Enterprise off the list, and you can't tell me why. You've taken over 1,000 companies off the list, yet nobody has been held accountable for it. Is it acceptable to you that not a single company has ever been held accountable for indigenous identity fraud by your government?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: It appears to me that I have answered your question, and I have answered your question repeatedly.

However, I will tell you that removals from the list are for many reasons that can be quite benign. For example, businesses could be closed. They could be non-responsive to requests from the department—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Are 1,000 businesses suddenly non-responsive?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: There could be changes in the business ownership structure. There could be a number of different reasons. What I would say is that—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Could you provide a breakdown of those reasons for each of those companies?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ben Carr: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Carr.

Mr. Ben Carr: Again, it's extremely difficult to follow the discussion in both official languages. There are francophone members and others listening to the discussion in both official languages. I hope our colleagues can do a better job of following the rules, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Carr.

Mr. Genuis's time is up.

[*English*]

I want to give the witness an opportunity to finish her answer. Then we'll move on to the next questioner.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: It's affirming that the Conservative Party agrees that the 5% target is so important that we must ensure that the way we do this affirms indigenous identity. However, it is also clear that the Conservative Party has no idea what to do about this problem. We do, and we're going to take control.

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

Next we will move to Ms. Gainey for five minutes. The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anna Gainey (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to all the witnesses. It's a pleasure to have them with us today.

I'll start with Mr. Duclos.

Minister, we know that bad actors often try to take advantage of the procurement system. I know that our government recognizes this and has taken significant steps to stop this kind of fraud and hold people accountable.

Can you elaborate on what steps are being taken to strengthen the integrity of the system?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you very much, colleague.

Before I answer your excellent question, I'd like to talk about the broader context.

There are about 60,000 indigenous businesses in Canada, but only about 2,900 are currently registered on the indigenous business directory. The government is therefore working hard to encourage more indigenous businesses to register so they can more easily and quickly contribute to meeting the needs of the Canadian government.

As Minister Hajdu said a little earlier, if we work harder on this, that will help create better jobs for indigenous people across Canada, build better businesses and reduce the costs of poverty. Minister Hajdu may not have mentioned that, if we achieve the full participation of indigenous businesses in Canada, approximately 150,000 indigenous people could be lifted out of poverty. There would also be major benefits for families and communities.

Minister Hajdu also said that, by working harder to reach or even exceed the 5% target—this is a minimum, not a maximum—we will also create tens and tens of billions of dollars in revenue in Canada. That will give us more tax revenue to provide more funding for education, health and infrastructure services for indigenous peoples.

Now, to get there, this program must also build confidence. That requires integrity. Your question is therefore very relevant. What can my department do to help ensure the integrity of this program and Canadians' confidence in it?

Thanks to my departmental officials' leadership, we had the opportunity to create a new entity just a few months ago, in May 2024. The Office of Supplier Integrity and Compliance, or OSIC, supports Minister Hajdu and her team in situations where we may want to act quickly to suspend a supplier from existing contracts or declare them ineligible for future contracts. For example, we can now act more quickly to suspend or declare ineligible any business that commits an offence under the Criminal Code or the Financial Administration Act, that has been declared ineligible by a competent authority other than the Canadian government or even by an international organization, that has violated the Code of Conduct for Procurement, or that has committed offences related to forced labour, the environment or the Canada Labour Code. Finally, even if there has not been a criminal charge or conviction, when OSIC determines that there is a risk associated with the Government of Canada contracting with a particular company, that company can be temporarily or permanently suspended or declared ineligible.

• (1700)

Ms. Anna Gainey: Thank you.

[English]

How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Ms. Anna Gainey: Okay.

Minister Hajdu, in the last exchange, the back-and-forth was a little hard to follow. I'll allow you to finish some of your sentences.

You started something, and I'm curious if you could elaborate on it. You said that there were also examples of where we're exceeding the 5%. You had data.... There was a question around data inconsistencies, perhaps with the AFN. If you have an example, maybe this is an opportunity to show some of the success or to show where we are hitting those marks.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you for the question.

I will submit that to you in writing, because I don't have it across all departments, but I can tell you, for example, that in Indigenous Services Canada, where we have a bit of a leg up with relationships with indigenous peoples, it's at 18%.

These are significant numbers. They're generating wealth for communities. That's the piece that sometimes gets lost in this conversation. It's not just something that's nice to have; this is about helping communities have economic self-determination.

What does that mean? It means that if the Government of Canada is funding a fire hall, for example, and if the community wants to add two more bays and two more trucks, it doesn't have to work directly with the department to do that. It has the economic freedom to be able to do this. Isn't that what we're all about—economic freedom?

These procurement targets are playing a really important role in helping the Government of Canada turn its head to new business partners to fulfill some of the contracts of the Government of Canada. It also opens doors to new companies that may have never seen themselves as being able to secure a customer like the Government of Canada.

I can tell you that in just nine years of having been here, whether it's for grants, for procurement or in other kinds of relationships with the Government of Canada that generate revenue for an organization or for a company, oftentimes it is relationship-driven. There are obviously criteria that have to be met. There are contests and procurement processes, but a trusted partner is something that I think is valuable. When companies get a foot in the door, then they can start to establish their reliability as strong companies from which to procure. I don't want to lose that.

I think it's really important that you asked that question. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Gainey.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister Duclos, I'm going to talk to you a bit about the problem of subcontracting among indigenous businesses.

I'll give you an example. The Department of National Defence awards a contract to a subcontractor, who is then responsible for finding suppliers of clothing for Canadian Armed Forces members. The subcontractor is located in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. There are indigenous businesses that are perfectly capable of supplying the goods for this contract, businesses such as Bastien Industries in Wendake, which I'm sure you're familiar with. However, this company is not approached. The supplier in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu probably doesn't know that he can use indigenous businesses.

Why are subcontractors that do business with the government not required to reach out to indigenous businesses? Your government is usually the champion of inclusion criteria, after all. Why is this criterion not a requirement in calls for tender?

• (1705)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you, Mr. Champoux. That's a great question.

I would say that there are a number of ways to encourage, and sometimes even require, indigenous businesses to participate in the procurement process, depending on the situation. As I was saying, the Canadian government sometimes has an obligation to award contracts to indigenous businesses in certain contexts and certain geographic locations. Generally speaking, our approach to encouraging the full participation of indigenous businesses applies to all Canadian government contracts.

In all cases, if companies submitting a proposal want to increase their chances of being awarded a contract, we encourage them to submit indigenous participation plans. If they themselves are indigenous businesses, we encourage them to include indigenous subcontractors as well. When a contract is awarded to a non-indigenous business, we encourage that business to subcontract with indigenous businesses and to demonstrate commitments to employment, training and benefits for the communities.

The fact remains that it's a competitive process. Apart from the exceptions I mentioned initially, these competitive processes can result in subcontractors who are not indigenous being hired.

Mr. Martin Champoux: In the example I shared, it appears that the company in question was not even aware or informed of the opportunity to participate in a contract that was a perfect fit for its corporate profile.

Is the message not getting through? For example, when you award a contract to a subcontractor who is then responsible for finding suppliers, is it at that second stage that the message doesn't get through?

The Chair: Please keep your answer brief.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: My answer will be brief, since the member already said it very well in his question. The Canadian

government not only has the desire, but also the obligation, to increase its communication activities and enhance its relationship with indigenous peoples and businesses. That's done in a number of ways. Several hundred activities of this kind have been held in recent years and thousands of indigenous businesses have taken part in them, but too many businesses are unfortunately still not well enough informed.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Champoux.

[English]

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

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Qujannamiik, Iksivautaq.*

I'm not too sure to which minister I should ask this question regarding article 24 of the Nunavut Agreement, with article 24 being about Inuit firms getting government contracts.

As you might be aware, the federal government has obligations as well. I wonder if one of you can give us an update about how the implementation of article 24 is going.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I can take this question. Thank you very much.

MP Idlout, you are obviously very aware of where this article 24 comes from and aware of why it was so important to Nunavut. That was followed, as you also will know, most likely, by a Treasury Board directive on government contracts in 2019, which went beyond article 24. That comes with the requirement that government contracting in the Nunavut settlement area meets the federal government's obligations under article 24, as you have said.

It means that Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, the organization whose leadership is so key, is responsible for maintaining a registry of Inuit firms that helps to identify those commodities and services that are needed—

Ms. Lori Idlout: Could you just quickly respond? I don't have enough time. How do you think the implementation of the federal obligations is going?

• (1710)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I missed the....

Ms. Lori Idlout: The federal government has obligations to implement under article 24. Could you give us a status update on how the federal government is doing in implementing article 24?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Okay. I would prefer to send those details to you directly, because there are many aspects to that important question, and I think you deserve to know the list of them.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Thank you so much. I'll look forward to that.

I do have another question for Minister Hajdu regarding the indigenous business directory, which I understand is led by your department.

At what point do you think that the government will get out of the business completely so that it's led by indigenous peoples?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I would say in the very near future. The challenge, as I indicated in some of my answers to your colleagues, is that we had hoped that we would get to a place of consensus. We've had indigenous partners studying the next steps on what to do, as you know, for quite some time. In fact, they provided a report. Even the report itself is conflicted in terms of any consensus.

I think the next step, for me, is to contemplate how we ensure that we set up an independent approach somehow with voices of all of the distinctive groups on that independent agency, for lack of a better word, that will then begin that hard work of wrangling through what the criteria are. I would say that it will be challenging, as you know, because there are a number of different scenarios that different people have a variety of perspectives on.

To me, the allegations over the weekend, combined with the ongoing attention on the indigenous business directory, means that it is high time for indigenous people to control for themselves the space of identifying what an indigenous business is and what qualifies someone to say that it is an indigenous business. Then we can work with PSPC to make sure that the targets are accessible to those businesses.

As I said, it's important that we have an approach that partners feel confident in.

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

Next, we'll go to Mr. Zimmer for five minutes.

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

Thanks to our witnesses for coming today.

A recent article said, "Canadian Army says new military sleeping bags not suitable for 'typical Canadian winter'". Rob Huebert, an Arctic expert, said, "I wonder if they should have just gone to Canadian Tire."

The defence department spent more than \$34.8 million on 55,000 sleeping bags. This is from the article:

Troops who had used the recently issued General Purpose Sleeping Bag System...late last fall in a preparatory exercise found "several critical issues"....

Temperatures during the deployment ranged from -5C during the day to -20C at night.

Those are hardly harsh conditions in the Canadian winter or north. It continued:

The "critical issues" discovered by the soldiers "related to a lack of warmth with the new GPSBS"—

Mr. Ben Carr: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'm pausing the time. Mr. Carr has a point of order.

Mr. Ben Carr: Although I deeply respect that my colleague is asking important questions that pertain to the men and women in our armed forces, last time I checked, this is not the committee for national defence, nor is there anything in the motion related to relevance on this topic.

Perhaps our colleague can be reminded, Mr. Chair, of why we're here. He should know that, because the 18 hours that we're sitting were forced upon us by them. Perhaps he can get back to the topic at hand.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Carr.

We provide a fairly wide range of latitude here, but I do want to remind members to make sure they're sticking with the matter at hand here as well.

I did stop the time for you, Mr. Zimmer. You have a little bit more than four minutes.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: It continued:

The "critical issues" discovered by the soldiers "related to [a] lack of warmth with the new GPSBS", said the briefing note, written on [December 5th, 2023].

Why would you buy 55,000 sleeping bags—for \$34.8 million—that don't work in our Canadian north or the Arctic?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I think the answer was already suggested by my colleague Ben Carr. You have the right to ask the question, and you have the right to have the right person answer it. Minister Blair would be the right person in this case.

● (1715)

[English]

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thank you, Minister, but actually, it's your department that's in charge of procurement and procurement of military-issued materials. We asked for this in my Order Paper question in September. It was given to your department, and you answered us. That tells me that it was your department that was responsible—

Mr. Ben Carr: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Carr has a point of order.

Mr. Ben Carr: I'm seeking your guidance, Mr. Chair.

I understand, as a chair as well, that we can give a generous amount of latitude. Can Mr. Zimmer—and if not Mr. Zimmer, you—please provide some explanation as to how anything—anything—in the order that the House passed here in relation to the question that he is currently asking is connected to the procurement of military supplies?

If not, Mr. Chair, then I will yet again intervene with a point of order to ask for further guidance.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Carr.

Certainly the study that we're doing today is an update to the barriers to economic development in indigenous communities. I was giving a fairly wide latitude to Mr. Zimmer in hopes that his line of questioning would circulate to the matter at hand. I do want to remind members to stick to the topic at hand and on which we have been ordered by the House to do this study.

With that, I'll turn the floor back to Mr. Zimmer. You have a bit more than three minutes left.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll get back to my question.

Again, the question went to your ministry, Minister, and what you sent back as an answer was that this adaptability makes the sleeping bag suitable for diverse operational environments, including but not limited to Arctic conditions.

Once again, it was your department that procured these sleeping bags that don't work, and it does relate to what this committee is here about. It's about Arctic sovereignty and about our north—

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

The Chair: We have a point of order from Mr. Hanley.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: With respect, and in a follow-up to my colleague Mr. Carr, I'm failing to see the relevance of this question to the subject at hand: barriers to economic development in indigenous communities.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hanley.

Again, I also don't see the relevance of this to the study at hand. We do have some very significant issues. I would suggest that we should be spending this time on barriers to indigenous economic development and procurement.

I know that there have been very many relevant questions that have been asked today, and I'll just remind members to be sure to stick to the topic at hand so that we can get those answers.

I'll go back to Mr. Zimmer.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I represent, as the shadow minister for northern affairs and Arctic sovereignty, northerners and Inuit across the three territories. One thing that is very much a concern for people in the north is Arctic sovereignty and security. Equipment like this is procured and needed for their Arctic sovereignty. Protection of that Arctic sovereignty is necessary.

Mr. Ben Carr: Mr. Chair, that's debate.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I know this government doesn't want to talk about it.

Mr. Ben Carr: Mr. Chair, that's debate.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I know this government has another point of order.

Mr. Ben Carr: Mr. Chair, it's debate.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: That's fine. Let's get back after it, then.

Is that fine?

Mr. Ben Carr: It is, as long as it's relevant, Mr. Zimmer.

The Chair: Mr. Zimmer, I'm going to hand the floor back to you. You have a little more than two and a half minutes at this point. Please do your best to stick to the topic at hand.

We did a very robust study on the north. The committee actually visited a number of communities in the north, where we studied these topics. I think that would have been a very appropriate time to bring up those topics. I don't see the relevance to the matter at hand today. I want to give you the opportunity, in the two and a half minutes you have at this point, to return to that.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thank you. I'll get back to it once again.

Are you the procurement minister, yes or no?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: That's an easy question to answer. Yes. I'm there to help you.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Let's get back to it.

There's a project called the polar icebreaker project. There was a 2024 update by the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

How much is the polar icebreaker project projected to cost now, Minister?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I'll answer this question, although I know some others might want to ask why we're not investing our time and energy in supporting indigenous businesses' access to federal procurement, which is so important for the economic and social development of workers and businesses in those communities. This is a rare instance, and I think a very precious one, in which we can all gather our—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Minister. It's a point of order.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: It's a very simple question. He said he had it. It sounded like he read the report.

The simple question is this: How much is the project costing to date?

• (1720)

Mr. Ben Carr: It's not a point of order.

However, on the same point of order, Mr. Chair....

The Chair: Mr. Carr, go ahead on the same non-point of order.

Mr. Ben Carr: Well, if it's going to be recognized, I sure will.

Mr. Chair, again Mr. Zimmer is not talking about anything relevant to the topic at hand. It was Conservative members, along with the NDP and the Bloc, who sent us back here to talk about indigenous economic development and barriers to it. He has not used the word "indigenous" in the last four minutes in anything related to the question he posed to the Minister.

Chair, it is your prerogative to remove the floor from a member who is not staying relevant to a study. My colleague may be mistaken, but that is in fact the case.

I ask this now for the fifth time, Mr. Chair. If he wants Minister Blair in that seat to answer questions about military procurement, he can go to the defence committee and do so. It's insulting that we have been asked to talk about indigenous issues, and he hasn't used the word "indigenous" to ask a question.

Thank you very much.

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

Again, I want to remind members to stick to the matter at hand. There is a certain amount of chair's prerogative in these things, and I want to give Mr. Zimmer another chance to ask one of those very relevant questions. I know we have many questions we want to get answered that are outside the scope of this study that we're here to do, in addition to barriers to economic development in indigenous communities, as was ordered by the House.

Mr. Zimmer, I will give you the floor once more, but if it's not going to be relevant to the study at hand, we are moving on to another member.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

What I'm speaking about—how it affects northern communities and Arctic sovereignty—involves indigenous communities directly. If the member doesn't understand that, maybe he should visit some northern communities so he can further understand how concerned they are about the lack of activity by this Liberal government on Arctic sovereignty and security. Maybe he wants to go and talk to some northern communities and ask them these questions.

Can I get back to my question, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Brendan Hanley: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You will have the floor for another two minutes or less. However, again, there are many ways to frame this question to make it relevant for this study. I would invite you to do that. I will turn the floor back to you.

First, I see that Mr. Hanley has a point of order.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Yes, I do.

I suggest that my friend Mr. Zimmer is engaging in debate rather than addressing a point of order. This is really about indigenous procurement. Again, the topic is indigenous procurement, not "indigenous" as some kind of broad, anything-goes topic.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Zimmer, I'll hand the floor back to you.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thank you.

We're here today talking about, really, the NDP-Liberal government and its scandal around procurement, and specifically around indigenous procurement. I'm asking you a question about how much the icebreakers are costing, and it's all very relevant because it involves the north.

Please, on the polar icebreaker project that was supposed to cost \$720 million, which was announced by a previous Conservative government, what has the cost ballooned to, to date, Minister?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: There are two pieces of good news here. The first one is that you're a member of Parliament for a riding where I think there are 13 first nations communities, so it's good that we have this opportunity here to speak about the indigenous businesses procurement—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: The actual cost of the acquisition of those two polar icebreakers has ballooned to an estimated \$8.5 billion. I think what's concerning to northerners—

Ms. Anna Gainey: I have a point of order.

The Chair: There is a point of order from Ms. Gainey.

Ms. Anna Gainey: The relevance here is just way off topic.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: We're still talking about northern issues and indigenous....

Ms. Anna Gainey: We are not talking about northern issues. We are talking about the motion that was put before the House, which is why we are here.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gainey.

Again, I am not seeing how this is relevant at all to the study at hand. If it would be useful, I would be happy to circulate the motion again. The study at hand, again, is about indigenous economic procurement and indigenous economic development. That is what we are dealing with today.

Again, Mr. Zimmer, we have been through this now, through many points of order. I don't want to keep....

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I'll finish with one last comment, then, and we'll move on.

The Chair: I will give you the floor for one last comment, and then we are going to move on to the next questioner.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thank you, Chair.

I know that the NDP-Liberals, whether it is you, Minister, or the panel across the way, don't want to answer these questions that really matter to northerners and to our Arctic sovereignty. I understand that. You're wrapped up deep in scandal. You want to change the channel. I understand, and it's unfortunate that as minister, you're refusing to answer my questions today at committee.

Thank you.

• (1725)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: A great question we should be answering, too, MP Zimmer, is about how we should be supportive of your 13 first nations communities in accessing federal procurement activities, like the McLeod Lake first nation, the Doig River First Nation, the Blueberry River First Nations and many others that are all located in your riding. It would be great if we could spend time together, within this particular setting, to support the indigenous businesses in your first nations communities.

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

Next, we're moving to our last questioner on the second round.

Mr. McLeod, you have five minutes.

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for appearing here today.

It's very refreshing to have this discussion. I'm struggling to follow some of the questioning, though. I don't know what icebreakers have to do with indigenous people. We don't really have any role. We don't have any kind of participation in receiving any of that money. We don't have anything to do with the sleeping bags that the military is getting.

I belong to the Rangers. We supply our own sleeping bags. Nobody buys them for us, so maybe that's something we need to discuss at a different time.

I live in an indigenous community. I've watched this my whole life. Procurement has been pitiful. It has been embarrassing, when it comes to indigenous companies and organizations. In the north, we see RCMP buildings and other federal infrastructure projects coming forward. There's not one person from the community working on them. Usually it's a union restriction, or we can't get a set-aside agreement because the process is too cumbersome. It takes too long, and we miss the opportunity.

As we move forward, now that we've moved forward with this government, we're starting to see changes. If we're going to move forward towards economic reconciliation, we have to make sure the tool box is full. That means no longer doing business the way we did it historically. I know we pleaded with the Conservative federal government for many years to make changes. It didn't happen. We're doing it now, but it's not enough.

Funding has to go directly to indigenous governments for their own infrastructure projects. That has to start. We need to start looking at equity participation. For some of these big projects, indigenous people need to be part of the ownership. They need to hold some of the shares in some of these big projects that are coming forward.

There is the issue of resource revenue sharing. The Northwest Territories is one of the few jurisdictions that shares resource royalties with indigenous governments, but the federal government still takes 50% of the royalties off our lands. I say that because indigenous governments still have a long way to go to sort out land tenure and disputed land. Resource royalties are being generated. They are mostly going to the federal government, so that has to change.

Mobility is another issue that we need to talk about if we're going to talk about economic reconciliation. It was reported way back to this committee that we have a couple of hundred thousand people who are unemployed. There are indigenous people in communities in the west and in the north who can't get jobs, even though there are jobs just across the way from them, because mobility is a challenge.

We've managed to secure a 5% procurement target for indigenous companies, but it's not enough. It's a good starting point, but we have a long way to go.

My question is to Minister Hajdu. It's completely my belief that indigenous people have to manage this. It has to be run by indigenous people. The resources would probably have to come from the

government, but it has to be managed by indigenous people with proper support.

I know there's already been a commitment. MP Idlout asked this question, but I want you to expand on the commitment to transfer the indigenous business directory away from the Government of Canada to the management and control of indigenous people. How are you making sure that first nations, Inuit, and Métis are part of this discussion?

• (1730)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you.

I think your story, MP McLeod, is so important, because you highlighted all of the challenges indigenous businesses have faced over a history of colonialism.

I do want to acknowledge your comment about the 5% target. That's the floor. We're hoping what we'll see is even more indigenous businesses being able to prosper not just from Canada as a customer, but also, hopefully, from other orders of government as well.

I will say that the numbers in my own remarks illustrate that this is not only good for indigenous communities and businesses, for opportunities for employment and for self-determination around all kinds of different things, but also really good for the economy of Canada. We are just shooting ourselves in the foot if we don't actually move more quickly to ensure that first nations, Inuit and Métis companies and people have opportunities to succeed.

You asked a really specific question about what the next steps are. I will say that we've been meeting with an advisory committee of a number of different procurement experts, business experts, from all of the different bases over the last couple of years to try to get to that answer. What would an independent procurement list agency look like? Who should hold this responsibility? Quite frankly, we haven't really had a consensus across the different distinctions groups or organizations that we're working with.

I think the next step is to pull people together again to think about whether they would like to proceed as a collective to design something that more quickly removes this responsibility from the government's department and places it into an independent type of agency. It would be something that not only could be stood up quickly but that also could provide the space for indigenous people to do what, I think, will be their hard job of wrangling around how they will define identity.

Identity, as you know, as an indigenous person yourself, is not as cut and dried as some of the opponents would like to make it seem. There are different ways that people define indigeneity. Indigenous peoples themselves define indigeneity differently. The Government of Canada's colonial process of having a very heavy hand in whether someone is status or not—for example, with first nations—complicates this conversation tremendously.

I am looking forward to this work happening soon. I hope that we'll have something to say in the new year about it. We're moving very quickly with partners on the next steps.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. McLeod.

That completes our second round of questioning.

We're moving into the third round, starting with Mr. Genuis for five minutes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

Indigenous leaders have said that indigenous identity fraud is rampant in this program, but no one has been held accountable. I want to come back to that. Nobody has been held accountable by the government for indigenous identity fraud. Let's zero in on one famous example, MP Randy Boissonnault.

His company, Global Health Imports, misrepresented its identity as being indigenous. We know that now. There's no debate. It made a claim that it was indigenous; that claim was false.

My first question is this: Has the indigenous identity fraud of Randy Boissonnault's company been referred to the RCMP?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I believe I answered this question at my last committee appearance just a few weeks ago.

The company in question, GHI, was never on the indigenous business procurement list. I believe Minister Duclos has additional information about—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Just before you chime in, Mr. Duclos, my question is very specific.

We know the company engaged in indigenous identity fraud in order to increase their chance of getting business from the government. That's fraud. Has this case been referred to the RCMP?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Genuis, when you say things like that, you have to be careful about the language used. You said that fraud was committed. You will need to prove that. I can assure you that, if fraud was committed, the politically independent mechanisms in place in the government would be used to deal with it properly.

• (1735)

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: My question was about referring the matter to the RCMP. However, I am a bit struck, Mr. Duclos, that you think I should be careful in saying that they committed fraud. They claimed to be an indigenous-owned business. They are not an indigenous-owned business, but in the process of pursuing a contract with the Government of Canada, they falsely claimed to be indigenous.

How is there any doubt about whether that is fraudulent?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: It's not up to us as politicians to determine whether or not fraud was committed—

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I understand, but you could refer the matter to the RCMP. I'm just asking if you made a referral—

[Translation]

Mr. Ben Carr: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: We want to avoid turning into an artificial court of justice. We have to trust the experts.

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Carr.

[Translation]

Mr. Ben Carr: It's extremely difficult to hear the minister.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Can we stop with this nonsense and just let people do their jobs? He wasn't answering the question, so I jumped in. Can you...?

[Translation]

Mr. Ben Carr: Mr. Chair, I think that—

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: This farce is not allowed to go on at any other committee, Mr. Chair. Can you tell them to be quiet and let people actually do their work?

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, the minister was in the middle of answering the question you asked.

[Translation]

Mr. Ben Carr: I hope Mr. Lemire will have something to say about that. There are two official languages.

[English]

The Chair: Before he could actually get to the answer, you interrupted him. I understand that there are times when you want to ask a pointed question, and that is very much the practice and procedure of committees. However, because of the interpretation difficulties and also because members might have challenges hearing, it's very important that we not have the crosstalk.

Because of the health impacts, which we've been warned about many times in committees and in the House, I want to remind members not to be cross-talking.

With that, Mr. Genuis, you have two minutes and 40 seconds.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'll give the minister one more chance to answer the question.

You have a company that I think quite clearly engaged in indigenous identity fraud. You might say, "Well, maybe it wasn't quite fraud; maybe they just lied in order to try to steal money from the taxpayers, but it wasn't really fraud."

Have you referred information about this case to the RCMP?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I would say that there is a right and a responsibility: You have the right to your opinions, and we have the responsibility to verify whether fraud has actually occurred. That responsibility is fulfilled in a politically independent manner, and certainly as far away from partisanship as possible.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: My next question is for you, Ms. Sultan.

Were you responsible for terminating the government's contract with Roundpoint Consulting?

Ms. Jessica Sultan (Director General, Economic Policy Development, Department of Indigenous Services): The contract with Roundpoint Consulting was terminated by the contracting authorities of Indigenous Services Canada, as the contracting authorities would in this situation—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Who made that decision?

Ms. Jessica Sultan: Any decision to terminate would be between the program authority, which is who I am, and the contracting authority.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You made the decision.

Ms. Jessica Sultan: It's a joint decision—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay—

Ms. Jessica Sultan: —between me and the contracting authorities—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Why was that decision made?

Ms. Jessica Sultan: The decision was made because the work that was being done under that contract had changed significantly from when it was put in place, and the statement of work that had been used to award that contract no longer reflected accurately what the contractor was doing. The work essentially had diminished and was not required.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

They were in the middle of doing an audit into the Canadian Health Care Agency, and according to reports in The Globe and Mail, the government—so, you—told them to no longer look into the indigeneity claims of companies. Is that true?

Ms. Jessica Sultan: No, what you just stated is not factual.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Is the story in The Globe and Mail correct?

Ms. Jessica Sultan: The audit was done in 2016. The termination of the contract occurred in 2023, and the changes to the process, including who was verifying indigeneity, occurred in 2022.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Is there anything in the Globe and Mail story on this that you dispute?

Ms. Jessica Sultan: I think that sometimes people.... The opinions reflected in that article reflect the opinions of Mr. Garry Hartle.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Is there anything in the article that you dispute?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I think, Mr. Chair, the official has—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: No, my questions are for Ms. Sultan—

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I am the minister, and I get to direct how the questions are answered and asked—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: No, you don't, actually.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Actually, I do.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, your time is gridlocked. Why don't—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, it's obvious what you're trying to do. The official responsible for this didn't want to answer the question, so the minister jumped in to prevent her from needing to answer it. It's obvious to everyone what's going on—

Hon. Patty Hajdu: That is not accurate, Mr. Chair. The member of Parliament, I would say, has asked the question and has received an answer.

What I would also say is that he asked this question of me earlier, and I gave him a clear answer—

● (1740)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, who has the floor?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I think, Mr. Chair, that it's unfortunate that civil servants are being treated this way—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I asked an official a question about very serious allegations, and I didn't get an answer.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, your time has elapsed here. There will likely be another opportunity to ask a question—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: That is very revealing, Mr. Chair. Everybody saw what happened. The official refused to answer the question, and the minister jumped in to try to save her.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, we're moving on.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Actually, that's not accurate, Mr. Chair. The official would like to speak at this point—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: That's exactly what happened—

The Chair: Order.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, this is not respectful of officials who are working on behalf of Canadians.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: They can answer questions, and you can let them answer questions.

A voice: [Inaudible—Editor]

The Chair: We're moving on to our next questioner here.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Actually, Mr. Chair, the official would like to answer the question.

Mr. Michael McLeod: I have a point of order.

The Chair: I'll give the official the opportunity to answer this, but we're over time here. We're moving on, but first we have a point of order from Mr. McLeod.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Mr. Chair, you're allowing people to speak over each other. I have a hearing issue. Today I brought my device for captions, but I'm still struggling to follow because there are too many voices coming on.

If we could restrict it to whoever is on the microphone, it would be greatly appreciated.

The Chair: Thank you for reminding members, Mr. McLeod.

We need to limit the crosstalk for both interpretation and for people who have hearing challenges.

I see that we have Monsieur Lemire on the same point of order.

[*Translation*]

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

I would also like to point out that interpretation is essential for francophones following this debate. However, it goes without saying that talking over witnesses makes it difficult to understand what is being said.

I want to thank the interpreters, who, despite the circumstances, are showing patience and dedication. They have mentioned several times that it was very difficult to interpret what was being said.

Mr. Ben Carr: That's exactly what I was saying earlier.

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

[*English*]

Before we move on, we will have a very brief answer from Ms. Sultan. Then we'll be moving on to Mr. Battiste.

Ms. Jessica Sultan: Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

I think the allegations in that article are very troubling and need to be taken very seriously.

There are multiple pieces of information in that article with which I disagree and on which I have a different point of view.

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

We're moving on to Mr. Battiste for five minutes.

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Ministers, the crux of this study seems to be that somehow, by setting targets for indigenous procurement, our government is doing a disservice to indigenous peoples. That seems to be something aligned with the questions. Nowhere in the Conservatives' questions have I heard any semblance of getting to the actual issue of indigenous identity, how we solve those problems and how we can work collaboratively with first nations. It seems very much like something that helps their cut-cut-cut agenda.

I'm wondering what our government has been able to do, compared with the previous 11 years under the Harper government. How do we stack up when it comes to talking about what we've been able to achieve through indigenous procurement?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thanks very much, MP Battiste. You're such an important voice at this table as a first nations member. Obviously, you have first-hand experience through your own first nation about the devastating impact of poverty and unemployment.

That's what the goal of the 5% procurement target is. It's to help elevate indigenous businesses—yes, and communities—out of what I would say was an intentional economic exclusion.

We set a procurement target. I think that's the first thing. This government has been very serious in its intention to pursue economic reconciliation.

I appreciate MP Ildout's call to be reflective when we're talking about the word "reconciliation", because not all indigenous people feel comfortable with that word. Whatever we call it, the Govern-

ment of Canada has reparations to make. We have been doing that as a government, as you know, over the last nine years, whether it's settling land claims or being more respectful of treaties and funding. There were all kinds of deficits left behind after a decade of neglect, including water.

It's also about ensuring that indigenous businesses are seen as the economic powerhouses they really are. That's the legacy of this government. I think it's an important one. It's one I assume members of Parliament who are Conservative believe in too. Why would they spend so much time talking about a procurement strategy if they didn't believe in the importance of indigenous procurement?

● (1745)

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Thank you, Minister.

Last week we had lots of chiefs in town from all across Canada. I know that you made time for them. I saw Ms. Ildout, and I saw Sébastien at important meetings and functions that they were invited to on behalf of the national chief, where they were able to talk to us about some of the key things that were important to them.

I know there's a House order out there that has a few parties, led by the Conservatives. They believe they know what's best for the indigenous people, so they start telling our committee how we can best help them. I know that in those discussions you had with them, they set out some of the things that were important to them. I saw resolutions around justice. I saw resolutions about water and the need to move fast on Bill C-61. However, when indigenous members get up in the House and attempt to seek unanimous consent on something as fundamentally important as having clean and protected water for first nations communities, Conservatives shout them down before the word "water" can even come out of their mouth.

I'm wondering, Minister, if you think this study is really about helping indigenous economic development or if you think this is more that Conservatives are framing that they know what's best for indigenous people in what we should be studying here at this committee.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Well—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I have a point of order.

The Chair: We have a point of order. We have Mr. Zimmer.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: He's using the same rationale as the Liberals. How is that relevant to the study today before us?

Mr. Jaime Battiste: I'm more than happy to answer that.

I said "indigenous" a number of times during that intervention. It was based on the conversations I've had with indigenous people. You should try it.

The government is trying very much to hear what they're trying to say and hearing from them. I'm asking the minister if she heard from indigenous people last week while they were here and if they were, in fact, advocating what the Conservatives seem to be telling us at this study, or is it something more, including the discussions around water?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Battiste and Mr. Zimmer.

There are about 40 seconds left.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Yes, I met with many first nations communities during the AFN assembly, and water did come up in many of the discussions.

In fact, in Mr. Melillo's riding, there are 42 first nations. As far as I can see, Mr. Melillo has not been to many of those first nations, and people are disappointed when their members of Parliament don't actually visit the communities in their own riding and don't advocate for the priorities of first nations.

I would just say that there's an opportunity to make amends. I get it. We're all busy. Some of these ridings are vast. I'm about to find that out myself with the riding boundary changes. I believe I'll be in the same position as some of my colleagues with many first nations that are remote.

It is important when we have a chance in this House to support first nations priorities, and not having unanimous consent last week was deeply disappointing, including to Chief Moonias, who said that if this legislation passes, it would help raise the standards or even set the standards for their drinking water. Right now, there's nothing there. They hoped it would have gone to the Senate today, and they're disappointed.

You can hear that there was a lot of hopefulness. I know that it's not our last chance. I know the committee worked really hard on that legislation, and I do hope that we'll see it get to the Senate before Christmas so that they can begin their very important study of the bill as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Battiste.

[Translation]

We'll now go to Mr. Lemire for two and a half minutes.

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

It's fascinating to see people defending a position in various public bodies, such as a parliamentary committee, and to see that, when it's time to take action in the House, they don't do so. We saw that last week.

I would like to ask you again about the Yānonhchia' project. That is a fundamental issue in the current context. I'll ask you one more time: Is the brief that you have to submit to the Minister of Finance written? Is a document ready?

The figures are available, we know what they are and we can help you with that. I sent a letter to Minister Freeland on November 21 to talk about this issue. You have received a copy of it.

I would like to see you take a more concrete step and give us a more official commitment. On this December 9, will you commit to

sending that letter to Minister Freeland as soon as possible, to assure us that it will be part of the next budget?

• (1750)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Yes. I've already discussed this program with Ms. Freeland. I also had a meeting with Lance Haymond, the project director for the Yānonhchia' initiative, a very important home ownership program for indigenous families. For the government, it's an opportunity to accelerate its work to make housing affordable for everyone in our country.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Haymond will be with us tomorrow, so we can ask him a follow-up question on that. Hopefully, his answer will be along the same lines.

Ms. Hajdu, in response to my colleague's question, you said that there was no consensus among the organizations that worked on procurement reform and on how to verify the identity and legitimacy of indigenous businesses.

Can you tell us clearly which of the members of the indigenous procurement working group do not seem to agree with the positions of the Assembly of First Nations or the positions of the Métis and Inuit in general? If a consensus cannot be reached, what are the dissenting voices right now?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: It's not about coming to a consensus on which businesses qualify as indigenous, whether we're talking about first nations, the Métis or Inuit. The problem is in agreeing on the best body to manage the list. That's what the discussions with the partners are about right now.

I think every partner wants to manage a list. However, if each partner has a different list and there are a lot of lists overall, it will be more difficult to achieve the program's objectives. Minister Duclos may have a different opinion, but I think that, if there are 10 or 12 lists, it will be more difficult for departments in terms of procurement.

We have to find an approach that is transparent and very firm, but that is also easy for client departments.

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

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Ms. Hajdu, thank you very much for your efforts in French. It was easy to understand.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you, Mr. Lemire.

[English]

The Chair: We'll go to Ms. Idlout for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Qujannamiik, Iksivautaq.*

I want to ask Minister Hajdu a couple of follow-up questions about the indigenous business directory.

You mentioned earlier that you're working with partners to make changes to it. Can you identify who those partners are?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Well, of course, you've heard from a lot of them: CCIB, NACCA, the Voyageur Métis corporation—I think I have that in the right order—and ITK with regard to the procurement through ITK. All distinctions are represented. There may be other people on the committee, but....

Do you want to hear from Jessica about the other groups?

Ms. Lori Idlout: Maybe you could provide that to us in a written response.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: We can, yes.

Ms. Lori Idlout: In your earlier response, you only said “in the...near future”. Can you give a more specific response as to the timeline that you're estimating it to happen in?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I would like to have a conversation with the partners about what timeline they feel comfortable with.

This is already accelerating what was supposed to be a five-year process. I think that we can't wait the full five years to transfer the list to an indigenous self-determined approach. Rather than impose a deadline on partners, what I think I'd like to do is come back with a timeline or provide you in writing with a timeline once we've had that conversation with partners. They need to be comfortable as well with the approach. It's important to me that I don't impose a deadline.

• (1755)

Ms. Lori Idlout: Thank you so much.

I do have a follow-up question as well for Minister Duclos regarding article 24.

I know that it also states that the Nunavut Inuit labour force analysis will happen. The last one occurred in 2018. I wonder if you can give us an update as to the work of the labour force analysis and the recommendations that may have been made to ensure that article 24 is being implemented.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: We'll make sure that the follow-up happens. We'll include all of the benefit criteria that matter to that important directive, including, as you've mentioned, the aspects of employment, training and skill development; ownership; and the overall presence in the Nunavut settlement area.

It will also speak to the criteria that are being used to evaluate bids. It'll be the process piece, but also, obviously—and equally important—the outcomes piece. We will make sure that we work with you and that whatever is provided to you is satisfactory and answers your legitimate request.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Thank you.

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

That takes us to the end of this panel. We will suspend very briefly before we welcome our next witnesses, who will be joining us in a couple of minutes.

I want to thank the ministers for appearing today. I also want to thank all our officials for answering questions.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I have a quick point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Schmale.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Chair, we also need to deal with the issue of Mr. Boissonnault's two business partners.

As per the House order, they were supposed to be attending committee to answer questions. I want to get your update. I know there was an update last week, but it would be good to find out exactly what the process is if they do not appear. Hopefully, on Thursday we could have them at this committee.

The Chair: Thank you.

First, I want to excuse our witnesses.

Again, thank you very much for providing the testimony and for answering our questions.

Mr. Schmale, we have made a number of efforts to contact the two individuals. I'll hand it over to the clerk to speak to that a little bit more.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Malachie Azémar): I've tried to reach them. Unfortunately, their phone numbers and addresses don't work anymore.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. The meeting is not over yet. Could you ask for silence in the room?

[*English*]

The Chair: Let's suspend. We'll be back in a few minutes.

• (1755)

(Pause)

• (1805)

The Chair: I'm calling this meeting back to order. We are resuming meeting number 136.

As we move to our next panel, I want to welcome our guests today, our witnesses.

We have the Honourable Gary Anandasangaree, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations.

We have the Honourable Ginette Petitpas Taylor, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, and Minister of Veterans Affairs as well, I believe.

They'll be supported by their officials from the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs. We have Valerie Gideon, deputy minister; Georgina Lloyd, assistant deputy minister, northern affairs; Heather McLean, assistant deputy minister, implementation sector; and Christopher Duschenes, director general, indigenous institutions and governance modernization.

From the Department of Employment and Social Development, we have Colette Kaminsky, senior assistant deputy minister, skills and employment branch, and Wojo Zielonka, chief financial officer.

Ministers and officials, welcome.

Ministers, you will have 10 minutes each for your opening statements, after which we'll move to the rounds of questioning.

We'll start with Minister Anandasangaree.

You have 10 minutes or less, please.

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

Let me begin by acknowledging that we are on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

Mr. Chair, I am happy to be back here at this committee to answer your questions on topics important to indigenous peoples.

I think it is critical that we acknowledge the long history of colonial systems that have kept indigenous people and communities from fully participating in Canadian society. I have made it a priority to work in partnership with indigenous communities to dismantle these barriers and to move forward in a way that is rooted in self-determination.

We are here to support indigenous communities as they shape their own paths to self-determination, which is in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Mr. Chair, identity and indigeneity are deeply personal and complex.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples says, "Indigenous peoples have the right to determine their own identity or membership in accordance with their customs...traditions [and practices]."

Our job is to support communities to do this work. Last week at the Assembly of First Nations special chiefs assembly and in some meetings I attended, this very topic came up.

• (1810)

[Translation]

Indigenous peoples know who their citizens are, and we should be allowing them to decide that. It is time to give power back to indigenous peoples, where it belongs.

[English]

Indigenous procurement is central to advancing economic reconciliation and ensuring fair opportunities for all. This strategy has been essential to supporting indigenous entrepreneurs and creating jobs at indigenous-led businesses, but we are also transforming the procurement strategy by improving policies, safeguards and processes.

Indigenous people have told us what will work and what does not, and we are listening. We must make the necessary changes in order to do better. We're working with partners to hand over the responsibility of defining and verifying indigenous businesses to the communities themselves.

Under the previous administration, before we formed government, indigenous businesses received only 1% of federal contracts. Once we formed government, engagements with indigenous partners have led our government to implement a mandatory requirement for federal departments and agencies to ensure that a mini-

imum of 5% of the total value of contracts is held by indigenous businesses.

Since that 5% target was implemented, the value of contracts going to indigenous businesses increased by \$1.5 billion. That is \$1.5 billion going to indigenous people and communities, and that leads to better success for indigenous people as a whole.

Recently we have seen reports of this strategy being taken advantage of. This is why Indigenous Services Canada is mandated to verify the eligibility of businesses receiving contracts under the procurement strategy for indigenous businesses. These audits led to over 1,100 indigenous businesses being removed from the indigenous business directory. We're taking direct action to hold programs accountable and prevent misuse.

For too long, previous governments neglected indigenous peoples. Since 2015, we have been reversing this trend.

One key highlight is the new first nations-led national land registry. This registry is key to unlocking economic opportunities. We have worked in partnership with the First Nations Lands Advisory Board and the Land Title and Survey Authority of B.C. to develop this registry. This will allow first nations to register interests on their land at the speed of business and improve economic opportunities for all.

In the last budget, we advanced the indigenous loan guarantee program to facilitate equity ownership of major projects. This program is determined to ensure that indigenous communities can share in the benefits of major projects in their territories, and on their own terms. The indigenous loan guarantee will help indigenous people share the benefits of major natural resource projects while also generating wealth for communities and support for indigenous-led solutions.

[Translation]

Another key part of advancing economic reconciliation is providing compensation for lost land and other wrongs through the specific claims process.

[English]

We have accelerated specific claims resolutions. Working in partnership with first nations from January 1, 2016, to November 30, 2024, 321 claims have been resolved, for a total compensation of \$12.6 billion.

I want to talk about two concrete examples. In June, on National Indigenous Peoples Day, I was able to join my colleague Jaime Battiste in the community of the We'koqma'q First Nation to announce the \$125-million proposed settlement agreement. I got to meet with the chief and council, along with community members of all ages, to see what this settlement means to them and what it will do.

In October, I travelled to Treaty No. 5, 6, and 10 territories to announce the settling of nine claims worth almost \$1.4 billion. These settlements happened under the strategy for expediting resolution of agricultural benefits. This expedited strategy ensures that claims are resolved quickly and gets compensation to first nations faster.

As you can see, Mr. Chair, we are making progress. Over the past five years, we have settled an average of \$1.7 billion in claims per year with first nations across Canada, which resulted in nearly 7,000 jobs. This is a significant boost to the first nations-led economy, and it is having a positive impact, a tangible economic impact on communities, not just for today but for generations to come.

Mr. Chair, as a government, we must never tell communities what to do or who they are. I know that committee members and indigenous people have raised concerns about procurement and the indigenous business directory. As this work is led by Minister of Indigenous Services Canada, who I know appeared just before us, I will let my colleagues' words speak more of it. Our role is to support and follow the lead of indigenous peoples as they walk their path of self-determination and prosperity.

I do want to have one reflection before I close.

Mr. Chair, I've spent my entire life on the issue of representation and why representation matters at every level, not just in the elected sense but also in business and in community. At every table, there is a need for representation, particularly for those who have been under-represented. In this particular case, indigenous people are severely under-represented in many areas of our society, but particularly in the area of business and the economy. The indigenous procurement strategy was meant to ensure that at the very minimum, the federal role towards economic reconciliation ensures that representation continues.

I'm glad to speak about this. I think this is an issue that is of critical importance to all of us, and at the very minimum, we can agree that we should be doing more, perhaps in a more enlightened way.

I look forward to the questions and comments from my colleagues here.

• (1815)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Next we will be moving on to Minister Petitpas Taylor.

You have 10 minutes or less for your opening remarks.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the committee members for the invitation to be before you this evening.

I would also like to begin by acknowledging that we meet today on the unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

I welcome the chance to join a conversation about issues that I believe can and should be addressed collectively across parties.

The work of this committee helps to guide Parliament as we walk the path of reconciliation.

[*Translation*]

We are looking for true reconciliation, with renewed nation-to-nation and government-to-government relationships, as well as relationships between the Crown and first nations, the Métis and Inuit, through which we will strengthen partnerships with rights holders.

At the heart of this journey is economic reconciliation. How can we work with our indigenous partners to build a fair and equitable Canada? All departments have a role to play in this work. At Employment and Social Development Canada, we are working to close the skills and opportunities gaps that affect far too many indigenous people.

We created the indigenous skills and employment training program, a co-developed framework designed to reduce skills and employment gaps between indigenous and non-indigenous people. Organizations have the flexibility to prioritize training and skills development based on the needs of their communities.

[*English*]

The skills and partnership fund fosters partnerships between indigenous organizations and employers. This program supports training that directly connects indigenous peoples to jobs, enhancing access to meaningful economic opportunities.

I would be remiss not to mention, in my capacity as Minister of Veterans Affairs, the ongoing work that my department is doing to improve services and recognition for indigenous veterans. First nations, Inuit and Métis people served Canada with pride, yet often they faced discrimination. The indigenous veterans engagement team works to reduce barriers to access, improve outreach and increase the offering of culturally appropriate services.

We're also investing in indigenous-led initiatives. Through the veteran and family well-being fund, we have provided funding directly to organizations like the Assembly of First Nations, the Southern Chiefs' Organization and others whose work improves the well-being of indigenous veterans.

More broadly, our government has invested in the next steps on the path of reconciliation through budget 2024. This year's budget includes indigenous housing and community infrastructure investments of \$918 million. This is beyond the \$5 billion already available for communities in 2024-25.

A recent report from the Assembly of First Nations found that every dollar invested in first nations infrastructure generates \$1.82 in economic output. This additional funding will accelerate work to narrow housing and infrastructure gaps in first nations, Inuit and Métis communities. Specifically, \$426 million is earmarked for first nations on reserve, \$62 million is targeted towards self-governing and modern treaty first nations, \$370 million will go to Inuit communities and \$60 million is set aside for Métis communities.

• (1820)

[Translation]

Restoring and promoting language and culture is an important part of healing, reconciliation and the promotion of a strong sense of identity and community.

We are investing \$1.8 billion to support indigenous communities in exercising their jurisdiction under An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families.

Budget 2024 supported indigenous cultures by investing over \$290 million in indigenous-led efforts to reclaim, revitalize and strengthen indigenous cultures and languages.

[English]

There is also an investment of \$388 million to support indigenous entrepreneurship and indigenous tourism, to unlock new clean energy opportunities and to support the strategic partnerships initiative.

Together as partners, we must do the work of creating opportunities and more prosperity for indigenous people across Canada so that they can succeed on their own terms.

[Translation]

I hope we can do this work together, and I hope our conversations today will help advance this collective goal.

Again, I want to thank the committee for the invitation. I also want to thank the officials for being here. We look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

We will now begin the first round of questions, in which the members will have six minutes.

[English]

We're going to start with Mr. Schmale for six minutes, please. The floor is yours.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Thank you very much.

Thank you to our witnesses.

Minister Anandasangaree, is it appropriate for Randy Boissonnault to remain in the Liberal caucus?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: As you know, each caucus is the master of its own domain, and I will leave that up to the Liberal caucus to decide.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Do you think it's appropriate that he remain in there?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I believe he has taken the right steps to reflect on what's happened and he is trying to defend his name. I do believe that he is doing the right thing at the moment.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Minister Petitpas Taylor, I would ask you the same question.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you so much for that question, and it's always good to see you, MP Schmale.

To elaborate a bit on what my friend and colleague has indicated, I believe that Randy Boissonnault contributes tremendously to our caucus. He contributes tremendously to what is happening in western Canada. He appeared at committee last week and answered a number of questions. I've appreciated serving with him as a member of Parliament in the class of 2015 and also in cabinet in 2021.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Do you think that committing indigenous identity fraud is wrong?

I'll start with you, and then go back to Minister Anandasangaree.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Intentionally misleading Canadians is wrong.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: It's the same question.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Yes.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Do you think it's also harmful?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Yes.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I have the same question for the minister.

For the record, that was a nod.

I don't know who to start with now.

Minister Anandasangaree, do you think the impact of Randy Boissonnault's actions has caused hurt and harm within indigenous communities?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: It's fair to say there have been a number of indigenous leaders who have spoken.

For his part, Mr. Boissonnault has taken responsibility and apologized. The issue of indigenous identity is quite complex. In his case, he is an adoptee, from what I understand.

I believe he's taken the right steps. This is certainly not something that anyone should take lightly. He is taking the right measures to ensure healing for those he may have impacted in a negative way, but at the same time to ensure he is able to clear his name and rebuild the trust that is required in the work that we do.

• (1825)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Minister Petitpas Taylor, it's the same question.

[Translation]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I'll say exactly the same thing as my colleague. I think Mr. Boissonnault did the right thing. He appeared before the committee last week, and he answered the committee's in-depth questions for two hours. Now he is taking the time he needs to really set the record straight and rectify the situation.

[English]

Mr. Jamie Schmale: An indigenous woman inside the Liberal caucus, Jody Wilson-Raybould, was kicked out of caucus for telling the truth. We now have a non-indigenous man who misled on a number of issues, including co-owning a company while still being in caucus. The list goes on. You heard the testimony. You referenced it.

We have an indigenous woman who was kicked out for telling the truth. We have one individual who is misleading and has a cloudy past. How come he still remains in caucus and Jody Wilson-Raybould was shown the exit?

Mr. Ben Carr: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Carr has a point of order.

Mr. Ben Carr: Is there relevance?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On the same point of order, let the record show that member Carr couldn't even keep a straight face while he was saying that.

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

As always, I want to remind members to keep comments relevant to the study at hand.

I paused the time for Mr. Schmale. You have two minutes and nine seconds left.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I trust how you keep time, Chair. Thank you very much.

The question goes to the ministers.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I will repeat what I said earlier. Mr. Boissonnault has acknowledged the errors that took place. He's talked about his personal identity, the complexity that—

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I get the errors, but there should be an extra step here. Why is he still in caucus? If Jody Wilson-Raybould was shown the exit—

Mr. Ben Carr: Mr. Chair, I have a legitimate point of order here.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: That's jaw-dropping breaking news. It's a legitimate point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Carr has a point of order.

Mr. Ben Carr: I had to specify it was legitimate in order to ensure that my colleagues across the way were aware.

We are still on the same motion we were on last time. Could Mr. Schmale or you perhaps provide some direction on whether or not a member belonging to a particular political party's caucus is relevant to indigenous procurement?

It's completely legitimate and fair for the member to ask questions about Mr. Boissonnault as it pertains to indigenous procurement. No one's interrupting him when he chooses to do that. How-

ever, asking the ministers to comment on the membership of their political party's caucus and how that pertains to a member is not in any way that I can see relevant to the motion that we've been sent here to discuss.

Perhaps you can speak to that, or Mr. Schmale can provide some further explanation.

The Chair: I'll just say one thing.

We are doing an update to the barriers to indigenous economic development. The order that was given to the committee stated in part "that it be recommitted to the committee for further consideration, with a view to studying the economic and antireconciliatory barriers posed by fraudulent bids and applications for procurement opportunities set aside for indigenous businesses, including those from non-indigenous-owned companies..."

I want to remind members of that. As much as possible, keep your questions and comments relevant to the study at hand.

With that, Mr. Schmale, you have a little bit more than a minute and a half to go.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Thank you very much.

We'll come back to that question in a second here.

Minister Petitpas Taylor, this is not the first time you've taken over a ministry from Randy Boissonnault. Do you feel uncomfortable doing so this time, under the current circumstances?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I don't understand the premise of your question.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: It goes to my previous question about Jody Wilson-Raybould's being removed from caucus and Randy Boissonnault still remaining in caucus.

I think this raises some pretty significant concerns, including the fact that, again, he co-owned a company that was still bidding on contracts. They checked a box claiming indigenous ownership, trying to access indigenous contracts set aside specifically for indigenous-owned business. Some 1,100 companies were removed from the registry. Now you're coming into this role, which is not the first time you've taken over a ministry from Minister Boissonnault. Under these circumstances, with this cloud that surrounds Minister Boissonnault, it can't be overly comfortable walking into that office now.

• (1830)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: First and foremost, I think that's a question with respect to his dealings that you'd have to ask MP Boissonnault.

I'm feeling comfortable getting briefed on a new file that I've just taken over in the past two weeks. Again, my officials have been very helpful in helping me get up to date on the files.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: To go back to my previous question about Jody Wilson-Raybould, she was removed but Randy Boissonnault stays. How do we—

Mr. Ben Carr: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead on a point of order, Mr. Carr.

Mr. Ben Carr: Can you provide some direction to the committee, please, on the relevance and the connection between a former member of Parliament, their membership within the Liberal caucus and the motion that we were sent here to discuss as it pertains to indigenous procurement?

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Can I answer that question?

It's about barriers to economic development in indigenous communities. I'm speaking to this because Randy Boissonnault co-owned a company that claimed indigenous status when in fact it was not indigenous. That, to me, is a barrier to economic development.

Mr. Ben Carr: Not the membership in caucus....

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Let's talk about it.

Mr. Ben Carr: Stay on track.

The Chair: Very quickly, ask a final question. Your time is just about up.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: That was my question: Why?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: That's a question that you'd have to refer to MP Boissonnault, and I think he was here last week for two hours to answer many of your questions.

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

We're moving on to the second questioner in the first round.

Mr. Battiste, you have the floor for six minutes, please.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to start by asking the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations some questions.

Minister, you've done a very good job of reaching out to indigenous communities, meeting with them—

The Chair: Mr. Battiste, I'm going to have to stop you there. For some reason, the microphone is very quiet. Maybe if you could just keep speaking, I'll see if it's a little bit louder.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: I can speak much louder if it helps you, but I'd rather just talk in a normal voice so it doesn't seem like I'm shouting at my minister.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Battiste; we're going to have to pause very briefly. For some reason, the sound level in the room is quite low, and we'll just pause very briefly. We'll suspend very briefly until we can resolve this.

Now we're going to start back up here.

Mr. Battiste, we're going to start over. You have six minutes, please.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Thank you very much.

My question is for Minister Anandasangaree. He's done a very good job in talking to indigenous communities across Canada about some of the barriers that they feel have kept their communities from doing as well as others.

You have the ability to talk to chiefs about the policies that were created by Canada that have kept them from succeeding. You've talked to communities who've had long-standing aboriginal and

treaty rights claims that haven't been honoured. You've attempted to right these wrongs. You've had many communities talk to you about systemic problems within the justice system and about other things, like clean water, that prevent communities from doing well economically.

How often, Minister, do you have indigenous communities come to you and say, "We really don't know who we are, and we think that we need your government to study who we are and determine for us who should and shouldn't be given eligibility for projects"?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, Jaime, for that question.

Let me just say that probably one of the overwhelming issues I get when I speak to leadership...and I would say that last week was a great example. I spoke to a number of caucuses, including the AFN Manitoba caucus, as well as Nova Scotia. Overwhelmingly, one of the issues that come up is the issue of why the federal government is still in the business of defining identity, particularly with respect to first nations.

As you know, the Indian Act is a deeply troubling piece of legislation that does define identity, and we know that over time it has had very negative impacts, particularly for women who have gone outside of their communities. I think retaining status for their grandchildren now, or the second-generation cut-off, is an issue of deep concern for many.

I would say that the commitment I've made is that this conversation will continue to happen. Modern-day treaties are an area where we really do want to ensure that the Indian Act... My preference would be that the Indian Act wouldn't exist, but in the interim, it's to work towards ensuring issues around citizenship and membership are left to the nations. I believe that we have some very constructive conversations taking place, especially in Ontario and other places where we have advanced the issues of membership, but we are still far off.

Jaime, I would suggest that issues around identity are probably the most frustrating issues that I get. I'm sure you've heard it as well.

Issues around procurement are not something that I often get, but it comes in the context of why the distribution of contracts isn't sufficient or ample for indigenous people. I often worry, as I outlined in my statement, about the representation of indigenous people in all aspects of our lives.

One of the conversations I'm having with the Clerk of Parliament is on the suggestion that I do not believe that we have many indigenous voices represented within the Clerk's office, whether it be analysts, whether it be clerks or even whether it be pages. Those are conversations that I think are very much leading towards ensuring that there is greater representation. There are obviously a great number of barriers that exist, including issues around language and issues around the way we assess applications, but I do believe that I have a responsibility particularly to ensure that the representation is wholesome and is one that is increasing.

I know that many of the professional schools, for example, are very much charged with it, but we, as a government, I think—and the whole of government, not just our department—need to do more to ensure that a greater number of voices are at the table.

• (1835)

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Minister, based on the conversations that you had last week with the chiefs, and based on your conversations that you've had over the last six months, do you think this study around indigenous procurement or going after Mr. Boissonnault are things that the chiefs are interested in, or do you think they would rather have us focus on key things like justice, indigenous policing, systemic racism and ensuring that we get water legislation passed in the House of Commons that would benefit all first nations communities across Canada?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Well, I would love for this community to study Bill C-77, which is on the commissioner for modern treaty implementation.

I also think there is a valid reason to study the notion of economic development in indigenous communities in the context of their realities and not just focus on one individual who has made a mistake and who's acknowledged the mistake.

I believe that this is a very constructive committee. I've been on it for many years. I do believe that this report will maybe shed light on what more we need to do as a government to ensure there is greater representation in economic development among indigenous communities.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

I'm sorry, Mr. Battiste, but I'm going to have to cut you off there. You're over time.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Minister, thank you for joining us.

You and your colleagues play an important role in determining what is indigenous and what is not. Procrastination on the identity file is causing a lot of grief to the legitimate members of first nations. I'll explain myself on this subject, but first I'd like you to clarify something.

Will your goal of scrapping Bill C-53 come to fruition? In other words, will you ensure that this bill doesn't move forward in Parliament?

• (1840)

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

[*English*]

Bill C-53 is a piece of legislation this committee studied. I want to thank the committee for the work it did. I know it wasn't an easy conversation. There were many dynamics there.

At this point in the journey of Bill C-53, I would reluctantly say that it may be hard for this bill to continue in its current form. As

you know, there was a court decision relating to the Métis Nation of Alberta. There was also a decision by the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan to pull out of that process. Consequently, I'm respecting those two separate but related conclusions. As a result, Bill C-53 will not be moving forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I would add that the Assembly of First Nations, AFN, reminded us at its convention last week that Bill C-53 should indeed be withdrawn. A number of indigenous communities who are members of the AFN had made this request, as well as the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador and the Chiefs of Ontario, among others. The same request was also made by the Métis community living on the Métis homeland, Red River, which you recently visited.

There is still a lot of tension and disagreement surrounding Bill C-53 in its current form. As you know, the Métis National Council is holding back information on a major report concerning the Métis Nation of Ontario. Also, the Métis Nation of Alberta file is on your desk. That just doesn't fly with first nations, the Métis and Inuit. I remind you that the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan left the organization in the spring of 2024, as did the Manitoba Métis Federation in 2021.

Can you tell us what is wrong with that organization? What about issues of adherence or non-compliance with regulations? First nations are a bit fed up with the cultural appropriation made by the ancestors of the Métis Nation of Ontario.

I'd like you to tell us if steps will be taken to clarify the role of the Métis National Council.

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: The Métis National Council has been in existence for many years. It is considered to be one of the national indigenous organizations in Canada, including the ITK and the Assembly of First Nations. As a result, it played a central role in a number of major discussions, and it continues to play a central role.

I am concerned about the issues around membership, but I don't want to comment publicly on internal matters of the Métis National Council without having a wholesome conversation. I don't think it's fair.

The issues around representation really rest with indigenous people. In this particular case, it's the Métis and their constituent members. However, from a national perspective, I look forward to conversations that we will have to see how it could be strengthened or what other alternatives may exist.

It's fair to say that I am quite concerned. I do look forward to speaking with the new president at the earliest juncture.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Do you consider the Métis National Council to be an indigenous organization?

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: What legitimacy does the Métis National Council have to operate at this time?

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: The Métis National Council, as I've said, has existed for many years—in fact, for decades. It continues to be recognized as a national indigenous organization. When we set up the council—

• (1845)

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: On what legal basis does it operate?

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: It's not a rights holder, and I want to make that distinction. However, it comprises many rights holders—not all, exclusively, but there are still a number of rights holders who are part of the Métis National Council.

As I indicated, we will be having conversations. I look forward to the conversation with them. I think it's premature to come to any conclusions on its future. I do think there's certainly a long history that warrants greater study and reflections on the work that the Métis National Council does.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you.

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

[English]

Next we'll go to Ms. Idlout for six minutes.

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Qujannamiik, Iksivautaq.*

My first couple of questions will be to Minister Anandasangaree regarding the indigenous loan guarantee program that was announced in budget 2024.

In a recent meeting with the First Nations Finance Authority members, they emphasized the importance of amending the First Nations Fiscal Management Act to allow for special purpose vehicles. Given the potential announcement regarding the indigenous loan guarantee program, wouldn't it be prudent to have these amendments in place to align with that announcement?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, Ms. Idlout.

I believe I have answered this question in the past, and I think we're probably in the same place. It is certainly a conversation we've had with the finance authority, and I believe I have another meeting scheduled with them this week. There needs to be a greater conversation, including with finance, in terms of what additional vehicles can be utilized towards raising funds.

I do think as part of economic reconciliation, that is a critical component of what we need to do. It may be premature, as we roll out the loan guarantee program, for us to do this at the same time, because I don't believe the background work has been completed at this moment.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Thank you.

My understanding is that the proposed amendments wouldn't cost the government anything and would enable first nation communities to act with agility in business. Whatever guidance you can do for that future work would be very much appreciated.

I'm going to turn now to Minister Petitpas Taylor.

I'm going to read from an article regarding what the Minister of Family Services in Nunavut, Margaret Nakashuk, said. It says that the “federal funding cuts are impacting her department's ability to expand job training programs in Nunavut”.

I'm going to read what she said: “I planned to rise today to highlight the work Family Services is doing to train Nunavummiut for job readiness using federal government funds from the Targeted Labour Market Transfer Agreement, but I am unable to do that because the Government of Canada cut \$625 million [from] the labour market transfers in budget 2024.”

Minister, you'll recall that I had written to you regarding the cuts, and I understand that you're still new to this portfolio. I was quite disappointed with the response that you gave me regarding the cuts. The federal government cut \$625 million from the labour market transfers in 2024. Cutting this funding significantly impacts Inuit and young people in my riding. It is a loss of \$890,000 in training dollars in Nunavut.

Indeed, it was the Redfish Arts Society, which is a program that helps youth at risk to be diverted out of the criminal justice system to learn their language and their culture and new skills.

Minister, could you please explain to my community how the federal government's cuts to the labour market transfer agreement funding does not perpetuate unemployment, underemployment and cycles of poverty, and does not limit the progress of Nunavummiut towards a more equitable and prosperous society?

• (1850)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you so much for that question.

Before I answer, I also want to acknowledge that you're not able to speak in your mother tongue. Being a francophone, I can appreciate that it's a challenge. I'm certainly hoping that this will be rectified for future committee appearances.

With respect to your question, with respect to the labour market agreements and the transfers that were made, the federal government had provided some top-ups back in 2017. From there, during the pandemic, we decided to keep on allowing the top-ups to continue. It was always made very clear that it was a top-up and that it would eventually go back to the original funding. It is my understanding that...or not just my understanding; I've spoken to many of the provincial ministers. I can appreciate that, for them, they wanted the monies to continue, but those monies were specifically put in place in order to ensure that equity-deserving groups were going to have more opportunities.

Again, if provinces and territories choose that they want to continue with the funds, if they want to further invest money, they absolutely can, but the federal government indicated at the time that it would be a temporary top-up only. It wasn't part of the ongoing funding.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Just as a follow-up to that, I'm not sure you understood clearly what the Minister of Family Services in Nunavut has said and how detrimental it is to Nunavut. This program is supposed to help make sure that those who are underemployed or who have more unemployment... They're still very much needing this kind of funding, even such a small amount as \$890,000.

I understand what you tried to explain, that it's supposed to be a top-up, but understanding that it has not done enough to meet the needs of Nunavummiut, can there not be a reconsideration to make sure that Nunavut's portion is added so that we can see this program having the positive impacts it needs to have?

The Chair: Please give a very short answer. We are over time here.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: [Technical difficulty—Editor] funding that's sunset. That is not just for the territory. It's for all provinces and territories.

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

That concludes our first round of questioning.

Moving into the second round, we will start with Mr. Genuis for five minutes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: [Technical difficulty—Editor] Minister Anandasangaree, it's good to see you here.

You made a couple of statements about indigenous identity in your opening. You said that indigeneity is “personal and complex”. You also said that indigenous identity is defined by “the communities themselves”.

I would just observe that these statements are somewhat contradictory. Either indigeneity is personal—that is, it's up to the individual to define whether or not they're indigenous—or it is defined by the community. If it's defined by the community, then an individual ought not to just say they're indigenous on their own, but if it's personal and complex, then that opens up more space for self-identification on varying grounds.

I wonder if you can reconcile that contradiction for us. Do you think indigenous identity is more defined by the individual, who decides how they want to identify, or is more defined by the community, which says yes or no to a person being indigenous?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, Mr. Genuis. It's good to see you again. It's good to be in a committee room with you.

Look, I don't think they're mutually incompatible. In a sense of collective identity, when we talk about collectivities, I do believe communities should be defining what that collectivity looks like and is, and the historical formation of that collectivity over generations, or in some cases millennia.

The distinction sometimes does come to the individual. For example, if you speak to Mohawks in Ontario, they will fiercely say that on issues around identity, it is strictly up to the individual na-

tion to define what citizenship looks like. It is not up to the federal government, in this case, to be—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: They're saying it's up to the nation, right?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Perhaps I can finish. I think you asked a very critical question, and I do want to give you a complete answer.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Please be brief, though.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I do think, in that case, that it is the collectivity that defines who their citizens are. That's the way it should be.

With respect to the individual, in a historical situation of the issues around residential schools or around child welfare systems, where someone's identity has, for myriad reasons, been compounded by the fact that they may not be living with their biological parents or not living in a community where they would have been born and where they could trace a long lineage, I do think it's legitimate for an individual to be contemplating and trying to understand what that identity looks like—

● (1855)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay, I have limited time. I think I understand where you're going with this.

In those cases, you have an individual who's seeking information about their own history and heritage that they've been separated from. It's still the community that defines that identity. It's just that an individual has been separated from that community.

This question is at the heart of a lot of this issue, because now a lot of people who don't have connections to any kind of community are popping up and trying to take advantage of government programs. I was struck by your comment that the Randy Boissonnault case is complex. I don't think it's complex at all. I think it's very simple.

What do you think is complex on these identity issues about Randy Boissonnault's previous claims around indigenous identity? What's complex there?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: To me, first and foremost, one of the things that I've contemplated on this issue is that he was adopted. He was not from his biological family unit—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'll just say on that, quickly, that he claimed to be a non-status adopted Cree. Ms. Idlout asked him what Cree nation it was, and he couldn't answer that question. His family's not Cree; his family is Métis. The rules around membership in the Métis community are very clear, and they don't apply to him, so it's not actually complex—

Mr. Jaime Battiste: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I just don't.... Why do you think it's complex?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Genuis; there's a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Battiste.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: I think Mr. Genuis' comment that the Métis rules are very clear is an inaccurate assessment.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: That's obviously not a point of order. Use your own round if you think what I say is inaccurate. Come on. You know the rules.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: If he says it's simple, it's offensive to indigenous people around Canada that he would think that. Indigeneity is a complex thing.

In his very question, he talks about [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Can we get past the feigned outrage? The Métis Nation of Alberta has a clear sense of who they are—

The Chair: There's too much crosstalk happening here.

Mr. Battiste, this is not a point of order. I want to give the floor back to Mr. Genuis. You have about 45 seconds.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: I would just ask for respect in his language toward indigenous people and their criteria for defining themselves.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Can I speak on the same point of order, Mr. Chair? The Métis Nation of Alberta know who they are. They have been clear about who they are and they have been clear—

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Show us the text.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: —that they get to decide and that Randy Boissonnault is not indigenous.

The Chair: Look, there's a lot of—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: We're going to hear from them very soon. It doesn't apply to Randy Boissonnault.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Do you know?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It's not complex. It doesn't apply to Randy Boissonnault.

The Chair: Mr. Battiste, right now Mr. Genuis has the floor. He has about 45 seconds left. There will be—

Mr. Jaime Battiste: He has to be respectful.

The Chair: I agree. All members need to be respectful. I know this is a very charged subject.

There will be another round for questions from the Liberal Party, and comments. I do want to give the floor back to Mr. Genuis for about 40 seconds.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'll just really drill down on this, Mr. Anandasangaree, and then I'll give you the floor to wrap up.

Mr. Boissonnault said he was non-status adopted Cree. He claimed to come up with that term in conversation with an indigenous researcher. The indigenous researcher said that he didn't give him that term.

You, Mr. Battiste and others want to say that this is complex. He's a member of your caucus and he just lied about who he was for political advantage. I don't think it's complex at all.

Do you maintain that it's complex, and if so, why is it complex?

Mr. Brendan Hanley: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, there's a point of order.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Again, please have respect for the member. I think the accusation of lying is inappropriate.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It's not against the rules to tell the truth.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Hanley.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Let's answer the question.

The Chair: I do want to remind all members to be respectful. I know Standing Order 18 speaks specifically to that.

Time is very short. If Mr. Genuis could get to his question, then we'll move on to the next speaker.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I've tried to ask it a few times.

I'd love to hear from Minister Anandasangaree again.

Why is it complex? It's not complex; it's simple. Why do you think the case of Mr. Boissonnault specifically is complex?

• (1900)

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Genuis, I believe I've answered that question. We can agree to disagree on this. It is not that straightforward for someone who was adopted into a family. The issue of identity is complex to start off with, but in this particular case, it's compounded by the fact that he was adopted.

I think he's spoken for himself. I'm not here to add to that. He's given you his position. As far as I'm concerned, if you disagree with my analysis of this, we can agree to disagree.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

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

We're moving on to Mr. Hanley.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Thank you very much.

Thank you to both of you, ministers, for appearing.

Thank you to all the officials for being here as well.

Minister Anandasangaree, I know that you feel very strongly about economic reconciliation. You refer to it often, including at this committee. I was reflecting on that topic as it was raised many times during the intergovernmental forum last week when there was a strong Yukon presence here for Yukon Days. We welcomed many chiefs to Ottawa, as you know, as well as first nation leaders, the premier and several ministers.

I'll also note, with the goal of economic reconciliation and first nation economic development, how important it is that we pursue the implementation of modern treaties. Of course, as you know, 11 of Canada's modern treaties are with first nations in the Yukon.

I was also reminded of how important it is to renew the fiscal relationship between Canada and self-governing first nations, as reflected in the collaborative fiscal framework policy, and of how Yukon first nations are really depending on the completion of this framework.

I wonder if you could update me specifically on this from your point of view regarding progress on the collaborative fiscal policy, where we are and where you expect we should be going.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, Dr. Hanley.

I've been reminded by virtually every Yukon first nation that there are 11 modern treaties that exist in Yukon. I certainly want to acknowledge that, and of course that was also highlighted at the intergovernmental forum.

Concerning the issues around the collaborative fiscal policy that we've done, we've undertaken a great deal of work, particularly with the Yukon first nations. I believe that we have significant movement, and certainly there's a commitment on my part to ensure that it comes to fruition. It is important that there be proper fiscal anchors and availability of resources for the full potential of modern treaty nations, particularly in the north, to be able to undertake, among other things, very important work around economic reconciliation. It is, in my opinion, one of the anchors that will enable long-term self-determination for first nations.

Yukon is a great example of a very supportive territorial government, and a great deal of work has gone towards ensuring own-source revenue. It's not just that; there are other areas of significant progress, including what I am hoping will be the first modern agreement on justice that we will be able to sign in Yukon.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Thank you for that.

On a similar topic of modern treaties and implementation, one of my main worries about the Conservative obstruction in the House over privilege is all the valuable legislation that's being held up. Among them is Bill C-77, as you know, the modern treaty commissioner act, which has not yet come back for second reading.

It's certainly one of the priorities that Yukon first nation leaders, along with other self-governing chiefs around the country, are really pressing to get done. Could you comment on the importance of passing this legislation and your role vis-à-vis helping to move this bill forward?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you.

Look, Bill C-77 is a bill that was co-developed by modern treaty nations. It's something they've been asking for for over 20 years. This was truly co-developed with the full involvement of all existing modern treaty nations. It is something they have been asking for from the government for the last number of months as we finalized it. We tabled the legislation earlier in the fall.

I appreciate that notwithstanding the deadlock, it seems, in Parliament, the people at this table were able to work across partisan lines. We were able to pass Bill S-16 and Bill S-13. I want to acknowledge and thank the members for that. I think these are critical pieces of legislation, and so are Bill C-77, Bill C-61 and a range of others. We need to unlock Parliament to debate them and have constructive work done. That's why we were all elected to be here. It is transformative work. In fact, one of the challenges we have with some of the historical and numbered treaties is that there is no mechanism of the kind we could have through Bill C-77, so I implore colleagues around the table to work in collaboration. One

thing I always pride myself on is being able to reach across the aisle to work with all of you here.

This is not about partisanship. Reconciliation, I've often said, is an intergenerational journey that involves all of us. No one party or government has exclusivity over it. I believe we've done a significant amount of work in that regard. Ultimately, anyone who cares about where this country is going on reconciliation needs to work with us on this.

• (1905)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Hanley.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Minister Anandasangaree, without the Métis of Manitoba, without the Métis of Saskatchewan, without the historic Métis settlements of Alberta and without the Métis of British Columbia, who were the last to leave the ship of the Métis National Council last Friday, does the Métis National Council still have a meaningful Métis voice? In its current form, is the Métis National Council still legitimate, in your opinion?

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Sébastien, with all due respect, I don't think it's fair for me to have this conversation in public. I think it's important that I have conversations with the Métis National Council before I express anything further.

I fully appreciate the questions you're posing. You and I have had a number of conversations on this. Out of fairness to the Métis National Council, which is recognized as a national indigenous organization, I believe I need to have those conversations. I'll be glad to have a follow-up with you after that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I urge you to immediately look into the operation of this organization and take the necessary action, given that it receives public funds.

I would add a parallel question: What is the basis for recognizing the Métis Nation of Ontario?

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I'm sorry. Can you clarify the question?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: You recognize the Métis Nation of Ontario. What is that recognition based on?

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: The Métis Nation of Ontario is deemed to be a section 35 rights holder, and they have been from the outset, since section 35 was implemented.

I can ask our deputy minister whether they wish to elaborate.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: There is a difference between the Métis in Sault Ste. Marie and the many Métis encampments in Ontario that define themselves as Métis and are recognized as such by the Métis Nation of Ontario, but are not necessarily recognized by the Métis themselves or by your government. Are they recognized by your government?

Ms. Valerie Gideon (Deputy Minister, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs): I would like to clarify that we provided funding to the organization to establish the criteria to define its members, also based on the Powley decision in Ontario. The organization is in the process of fine-tuning this work, which is essential to its governance.

• (1910)

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Will that report be made public?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Lemire, but your time is up. That said, you will have another turn to speak.

[English]

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

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Qujannamiik.*

I think that the line of questioning asked by the Conservatives is very relevant. I have a friend, MP Rachel Blaney, who's always said she's white, who in a funny newspaper article introduced the article by saying she was born as white and is still white, but she was adopted by a first nations family. She's kept it very simple. She's made it very clear that she is not indigenous. She's never used her identity as being adopted by a first nations family to make any claim of cultural benefit for herself, so to me, it's very clear.

My friend Blake Desjarlais has also said, "Everyone who claims Indigenous ancestry should be clear and direct when asked, especially when attempting to profit off of programs made for Indigenous entrepreneurs and businesses."

Having shown how simple this is, it is clear to me that the Liberal complacency on this identity issue is creating economic barriers to indigenous peoples.

My question is to both of you. What will you do to eliminate such economic barriers, to remove these barriers to economic development?

Qujannamiik.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you for those comments.

Look, I've been to Ms. Blaney's riding and I've met with members of her first nations community. I also appreciate the advocacy, the work she does. It's the same thing with Mr. Desjarlais.

I think we need to do better, and we need to ensure, first and foremost, that the indigenous business directory is led and controlled by indigenous people. I think we need to find a mechanism to do that, which starts off often with some deep consultations and co-development. Although it's Ms. Hajdu's portfolio, I do believe that we need to get towards self-determination. I often say that the work I do is about self-determination, and this should be no differ-

ent. Fundamentally, it should be something that's very much driven by indigenous people.

Ms. Lori Idlout: If you could, please answer my question about how you're going to respond to pretendians who are creating barriers to economic development. What will you do to address that?

The Chair: We're over time, so answer very briefly, Minister.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: For me, the starting point is to ensure that the identification is driven by indigenous people and not by the federal government. I think that's the transformative piece. The self-determination, in this case, would come from the distinctions-based individuals or groups that form the business directory or inform how the business directory is managed.

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

Next is Mr. Schmale for five minutes.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Thank you very much.

Thank you again to our witnesses.

I want to pick up where we left off when we talked earlier about fraudulently claiming indigenous identity and about it being is wrong and harmful. I think we all agreed on that.

How does the government recover from the damage done within its indigenous communities after that?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Schmale, first of all, let me speak about what Randy needs to do and what he is committed to doing.

My understanding is that he has acknowledged and apologized for the errors, and he has also committed to meeting with indigenous people and leaders in order to ensure that he is able to rebuild trust. I think that's a personal responsibility that he has taken.

From a government perspective, I want to talk about a number of issues that have come up from a process perspective. It's ultimately about how the government put in a directory that is not self-determined by indigenous people. I believe that is the starting point for this conversation. I think, then, that we need to do greater work around the review of what is constituted and what partnership looks like. It is ultimately indigenous people who need to determine what businesses are indigenous and who should be qualifying for procurement. I believe that is the path we need to take, and it can't happen overnight.

However, in the meantime, we need to have some significant safeguards to ensure indigenous identity concerns are addressed immediately while we develop a longer-term system.

• (1915)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Given the fact that 1,100 fake indigenous businesses were removed from the registry.... We had Shannin Metatawabin, the executive director of the NACCA organization, saying that upwards of 70% of the listed businesses on that directory are not indigenous-owned.

What other concrete steps have been taken to ensure this registry is true?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I believe Minister Hajdu answered those questions. It is very much under her purview.

However, I will add that thinking about indigenous procurement and ensuring that there is, indeed, 5% indigenous procurement are absolutely necessary. How we get there is where I think we need to do better, as well as ensuring—especially—that those who are eligible for contracts do in fact qualify under the current procurement mandates that exist. If we need to tighten those mandates, if we need to improve them and if that 51% needs to come to 60% or 65%, that's a conversation we need to have, but we need to have it in conjunction with indigenous people.

I believe the government is very committed to moving forward to ensure we do far better on this issue, with the absolute determination that we need to increase procurement for indigenous businesses.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: The registry is still not solid. We have one indigenous organization after another saying that it isn't solid. Given the fact that “Crown-Indigenous Relations” is in the name of your portfolio, to a large extent you're the one sent in—outside of negotiating and other things—to make sure that the relationship remains solid and strong.

It has to make you uncomfortable that Randy Boissonnault is still in caucus. You're the one managing the relationships.

Mr. Ben Carr: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead on a point of order, Mr. Carr.

Mr. Ben Carr: Coming back to this piece on relevance, I don't believe I saw a reference to “caucus” anywhere in the House instruction on the motion.

However, if we are going there, perhaps we can talk about why Karen Vecchio is not the chair of status of women anymore and why Arnold Viersen was removed from this particular committee.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: This is a bit.... You're letting this go on a little long.

Mr. Ben Carr: Mr. O'Toole was removed from their caucus. Maybe we can start to talk about why that is.

The Chair: Mr. Carr, I think you've made your point about relevance here. They are getting off relevance, as well, with the same points.

Again, I want to remind members that the study at hand is on barriers to indigenous economic development. The order is on the procurement side and the anti-reconciliatory impacts of non-indigenous businesses.

With that, I will hand the floor back over to Mr. Schmale for about 45 seconds.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order, quickly, on the same point of order, because this keeps coming up.

It might be uncomfortable for Mr. Carr's Liberal caucus, but we're talking about a case of indigenous identity fraud. We're talking to the minister responsible for the government's efforts on reconciliation. It obviously impacts those reconciliation efforts when a

member of the Liberal caucus is engaged in indigenous identity fraud and whose company falsely represented itself as indigenous to try to get government contracts. He remains in the Liberal caucus. That's very different from questions about committee assignments, etc.

• (1920)

Mr. Ben Carr: That's debate, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'd be happy not to talk about it if you didn't bring it up, Mr. Carr.

I know this is an uncomfortable subject for you. You probably have feelings about Mr. Boissonnault's indigenous identity fraud as well, but—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

We're getting into a debate here. Let's get back to the matter at hand.

Mr. Schmale, the floor is yours. We have about 45 seconds.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I will pose the question to the minister.

As the minister responsible for Crown-indigenous relations, are you comfortable with Randy Boissonnault still being in caucus?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I believe Mr. Boissonnault is taking the right steps in order to work with people he knows and to gain the trust of indigenous people. I will leave it to him to clear his name. He has been at committee before. He has answered the questions and concerns posed to him.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Do you have trust in the indigenous procurement program in the way it's set up now?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I believe it needs to be better.

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

Next, we'll be moving to Mr. McLeod for for five minutes.

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

I had to smile when a number of MPs made the comment that membership for the Métis was anything but complex and straightforward.

My family was in the Northwest Territories and living on Big Island in 1778 when Peter Pond showed up. My family was living in a Métis community well before the Red River Métis were established in 1869, but my family is not allowed to belong to the Métis National Council or any of the Métis national organizations.

I have three brothers and a sister that belong to different organizations. My sister belongs to the NTMT Métis Nation. One of my brothers belongs to the North Slave Métis Alliance. I belong to the Dehcho First Nations. We're all brothers and sisters. I'm in a land claim and my sister's in a land claim, but my brother, who's North Slave Métis, is not allowed to settle a land claim—yet we're all brothers and sisters.

It's anything but easy and simple. It is going to take a lot of time to sort out definitions.

I want to ask Minister Petipas Taylor, while I have the opportunity, about the veterans affairs committee. I want to ask about the study that's being done that focuses on the experiences of indigenous veterans.

I want her to share some observations. I raise the point because I had an uncle who went to war. He hitched up his dog team in my community, went across Great Slave Lake and caught a flight out of Hay River to Fort Smith. He went through a lot of trouble to go fight in a war. He survived the war, but he never came back.

I'm really interested in this study, because we don't know what he did. We have no history of him. We don't know what position he held. We don't know if he was wounded. On Remembrance Day, when we're asked to speak, I can point to the fact that I had an uncle who went to war, but I don't know anything about him, because he never came back. He came back to Canada and stayed in B.C., where the government gave him some land.

Can you elaborate on this initiative you're working on?

Hon. Ginette Petipas Taylor: Yes. Thank you so much, Michael, for that question.

This study, I believe, came about through one of the Bloc Québécois MPs who was really interested in doing a deep dive when it came to indigenous veterans and to Black veterans as well. Many individuals appeared before the committee and made it very clear that many of our indigenous veterans and Black veterans faced discrimination when they served in the First World War and Second World War, and it continues today. Many of the veterans returned home and did not get access to the services, the benefits, that their other colleagues received.

As a result, the committee has embarked on this study. I know where the committee is landing and that they've heard some recommendations from witnesses who have appeared. A few recommendations that we've heard so far are that it is really important to make sure that indigenous veterans are included in commemorative events and that we have indigenous representation there when events are going on, either in Canada or internationally.

This year in Montreal we hosted a two-day summit, and I'm pleased to say that 11% of the veterans who were present were indigenous and provided us with their points of view and also what was needed for them.

They've also made it very clear that veterans need to be made aware of the services and benefits they're entitled to. Many indigenous veterans live in isolated and remote communities, and as a result, Veterans Affairs Canada created a veterans engagement team. We go into communities 12 times a year—isolated and remote communities—and make sure that we can meet with people, meet with veterans, and make sure they're aware of what services and benefits they're entitled to.

We've also heard about having a directorate with a list of our veterans and making sure that we don't forget their stories and that we can identify who these veterans are as well. Once again, these are heroes whom we have to remember and celebrate, and it's truly im-

portant to make sure that the proper investments and energies are put in place to make sure that we can identify who these individuals are.

I've had the great pleasure and honour of meeting with many indigenous veterans, and when they share with me their stories, it's heartbreaking sometimes. We need to mend that. As a department, we are serious in wanting to have meaningful engagement and meaningful relationships with the communities.

• (1925)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. McLeod. That completes the second round of questioning.

We're going to begin the third round of questioning, starting with the Conservative Party.

I believe the first person that we have on the speaking list here is you, Mr. Falk, and I'll hand the floor over to you for five minutes.

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

Thank you to our ministers for attending our committee.

Minister Anandasangaree, are you familiar with Jordan's principle?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Yes, I am.

Mr. Ted Falk: Do you support Jordan's principle?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Yes, I do.

Mr. Ted Falk: Jordan's principle clearly says that all first nations children living in Canada will receive “the products, services and support [that] they need, when they need them”. Is that correct?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: That's correct.

Mr. Falk, if I may interject, this area is very much the purview of Minister Hajdu, so I will have limited ability to answer questions relating to this particular issue.

Mr. Ted Falk: Yes, but it's still all under indigenous services, and I think you should be able to answer.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: My role is that of Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, so I do think that this is best directed to Minister Hajdu.

Mr. Ted Falk: That's correct, but I'm just wondering. When a person of non-indigenous status receives money intended for indigenous peoples—like Randy Boissonnault's company—do you really think it's fair when the Hanover School Division in my riding has had to issue 93 layoff notices to Jordan's principle educational assistants because their funding was yanked by your department? Is that fair?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Falk, it's not my department, and I will not be able to answer this question.

Mr. Ted Falk: Well, I'll quote for you what Indigenous Services Canada indicated to the Hanover School Division in May. It says, “I can 100% confirm that if a school division is renewing an EA request for a student who had an EA approved in the same division in 2023-24, they can inform the EA that they will be rehired for the 2024-25 school year.”

The invoice that the school division submitted to your department for September was rejected on October 31. Is it fair that money—

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: With great respect to you, Mr. Falk, through the chair, I am unable to answer questions that are outside of my portfolio. I am not, for the record, the Minister of Indigenous Services Canada. I am the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations.

This is a matter that, as in your own words, sir, directly involves Indigenous Services Canada. I would encourage you to direct those questions to Minister Hajdu. I'm sure she would be more than glad to answer those questions.

Mr. Ted Falk: I'm wondering if you think it's fair.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I will not be able to come to a conclusion on a matter that I've limited knowledge on.

● (1930)

Mr. Ted Falk: What you're saying is that it's not a great enough concern for you that 93 educational assistants have been issued lay-off notices and will be unable to provide necessary service to indigenous children that better equips them—

Mr. Jaime Battiste: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Battiste, go ahead on a point of order.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: It's asked and answered. It's repetition. He's asking the same question on a file that he knows is not under the minister's ambit.

You can't take all indigenous things in Canada and put them under just one minister. That's what the Conservatives did and [*Inaudible—Editor*]—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Just on the same point of order, can you shut him down when he's obviously not referencing standing orders?

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Battiste—

Mr. Jaime Battiste: A little bit of knowledge about indigenous [*Inaudible—Editor*] unhelpful to their simple narratives, but there's a lot more—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It's not a point of order.

The Chair: This is not a point of order. I want to get back to the matter at hand here.

It seems to me that the minister is answering the best that he can. We did have Minister Hajdu here earlier this evening to speak to this issue.

The member does have about a minute and 45 seconds left in his time. I'll start the clock so that you can continue with your questioning.

Mr. Ted Falk: Minister Anandasangaree, you did indicate that you work closely with Minister Hajdu, so this is something that you could carry forward.

The department says that urgent issues, when it comes to issues of Jordan's principle, will be addressed within 48 hours. This is an urgent issue, sir.

It also says that non-urgent issues will be addressed within a week. This is an urgent issue, sir. This needs to be addressed. There are indigenous children who need the support that is provided by educational assistants. They are currently not going to be able to get that support.

Will you commit to carrying that forward to Minister Hajdu?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Falk, I will be more than glad to convey your concerns to Minister Hajdu.

I also want to encourage you.... I have not had a single question from the Conservative Party since my appointment to my portfolio. If you do want to ask a question of Minister Hajdu—I don't believe you've asked a question of her at question period, either—you're more than welcome to hold our government to account through that means as well.

Mr. Ted Falk: There have been these Liberal points of order when the minister was here. Perhaps I would have had a round to be able to ask her that question, but your Liberal colleagues have prevented me from doing that.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Falk.

Next, we're moving to Ms. Gainey for five minutes.

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

Minister Petitpas Taylor, I understand that there is a project in your riding that is near and dear to your heart. It's called the Atlantic Science Enterprise Centre. Minister Lebouthillier was also recently co-operating with you on that facility. I believe it was unveiled with both of you together.

Would you like to tell us a little bit more about this project and the partnerships that have been built with indigenous communities through this project?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: You're correct. It's a project that's near and dear to my heart and to all MPs from New Brunswick.

It is called the Atlantic Science Enterprise Centre. It is a significant infrastructure investment in that, through the Atlantic Science Enterprise Centre, five agencies will be under the same roof. The agencies are Pêches et Océans, which is Fisheries and Oceans; the CFIA; Environment Canada; the Canadian Space Agency; and the National Research Council. It's going to be a state-of-the-art facility where they'll be able to share laboratories and resources, and the list goes on. We'll be creating 700 good-paying jobs. We'll be partnering with local universities.

What was really interesting to me, Anna, is that two weeks ago, when Minister Lebouthillier was there, we had a press conference for phase two of the project. An indigenous elder by the name of Noel Milliea was there from Elsipogtog First Nation, which is a community about an hour away from Moncton. When speaking at the press conference, the elder indicated to me that the consultation process that happened with PSPC was really a gold standard. He said that oftentimes in the past, perhaps it was just checking the box, but here there was meaningful, sincere engagement.

I'm going to read you a quote, because I was hoping that the question was going to be asked today. The media asked him a question, and this is exactly what he responded to the media:

“I was telling her”—meaning me—“how important it was on the progress that we've made in building and rebuilding relationships, and when we speak about truth and reconciliation, we're actually moving towards acknowledging the truth, being mindful and using that mindfulness to create better relationships towards reconciliation. Reconciliation is still a little ways away, and right now, we're in the process of doing a really good job in that, and I have to credit also PSPC for the work that they've done above and beyond what they would normally call engagement, because it's past the engagement now, and it's more so into how we develop long-standing, meaningful relationships with each other, and so I think that that plays a very important part in the success of this project.”

The reason he was also indicating that is that the contracts that have been signed with indigenous companies have really exceeded the 5% threshold. It doesn't mean that the federal government doesn't have a lot more work to do, and we've heard a lot of issues about that here today, but again, this is an example of one of those good projects.

When elder Noel mentioned that, it just really struck me. You could tell that he was genuinely pleased with the work that PSPC has done, and he wanted to share that.

● (1935)

Ms. Anna Gainey: Thank you for sharing that with us today.

I don't know what my time is. The chair is chatting.

The Chair: You have about a minute and a half.

Ms. Anna Gainey: In terms of relationship building as well, perhaps we could go back. I understand that in 2023, Veterans Affairs Canada and the AFN signed a letter of understanding to strengthen the commitment in supporting first nations veterans. You spoke a little bit about this already. This sounds like a significant step that was taken, and I wonder if you could tell us a little bit more about the priorities established in this LOU and how it's helping to improve relationships between Veterans Affairs Canada and the AFN.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: When I talk about reconciliation, the message I want to share here this evening is that all departments have a role to play. It's a whole-of-government approach, and Veterans Affairs is certainly not unique to that.

Last spring, in 2023, the former minister of Veterans Affairs, Lawrence MacAulay, signed this letter of understanding with the AFN. Four priority areas were decided upon.

First and foremost was expanding outreach services, as I indicated earlier. That is a part of the study that's taking place right now at ACVA. Again, we want to ensure that more veterans are aware of the services and benefits that they are entitled to.

Another priority for them was establishing a clear point of contact for veterans. If they are veterans and need services, it was about how to go about those types of services.

Another was increasing indigenous representation when it comes to commemorative events across the country, internationally and here in Canada.

Finally, they made it very clear that establishing a historical record for first nations veterans was a priority for them.

Again, I was pleased that former minister MacAulay and the president of the day signed this letter of understanding. Our department continues to work closely with AFN and other indigenous groups to ensure that we can establish those working relationships in a meaningful way.

Ms. Anna Gainey: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Gainey.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Minister Anandasangaree, you don't want to talk about the future of the Métis National Council. I understand that, but I still want to talk to you about the present, to find out a little more about the situation.

Who is the legitimate voice of the Métis National Council? Who is speaking on behalf of the council and speaking to you?

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: As of yesterday, it was the executive director. There is a newly elected president with whom I will be engaging very soon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: There has been no notice of a meeting or a general assembly of members for over a year. A number of people have questions about the president who has just been officially appointed. Apparently, she has even been in her position since September 2024, but her appointment was just announced today.

What can you tell us about the process that led to her appointment? On what basis did the organization appoint this person, when the organization is unable to form a quorum?

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Lemire, I'm not going to comment on this any further. I think I've indicated my position to you. I will be more than glad to have a full debriefing and conversation with you after I have meetings. I don't think it's fair for you and me to litigate this matter in public.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I just want to reiterate some facts: The Métis Nation of British Columbia withdrew from the Métis National Council on Friday, October 29, and the new president is apparently that community's representative.

On another note, the organization is withholding an expert report on new Métis communities in eastern Ontario. Have you seen that report? Would it be possible for you to send it to the committee? I am telling you quite amicably that withholding a report that has been commissioned raises a problem that concerns legitimacy and the democratic aspect.

• (1940)

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I don't believe we formally received the report. Once the department receives it, I will review it. Based on consent, I will be able to table the report. However, I need to get the consent of the authority that can give me that consent.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you very much, *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: *Qujammamiik, Iksivautaq.*

To follow up on my questions on Liberal complacency about pre-tendians, their impact on indigenous peoples and the economic barriers they create for indigenous peoples, I want you to answer this briefly: Why was it so easy for my friend Rachel, who is white and who was adopted by a first nation, but so complicated for Randy, who has a similar experience but who has a lot of people who he claims make mistakes about his identity?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I think that for each individual, their experience and personal life circumstances may be different. You just heard from Mr. McLeod, who offers a very different perspective as well. I'm not the one impacted here directly. It is Mr. Boissonnault. He provided a set of reasons, and I will let that stand.

I want to reiterate that this is a deeply complex issue for anyone, not just Mr. Boissonnault. It is for anyone in very similar circumstances.

Ms. Lori Idlout: I'm going to change my line of questioning.

Bill C-15 was on the implementation of UNDRIP. Whose main responsibility is it to ensure that UNDRIP is implemented in Canada.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: It is very much every minister's responsibility. We're all part of ensuring that UNDRIP is implemented. We have 58 measures within the UNDRIP action plan. The lead is the Minister of Justice.

However, I would say that more than a third of those action plan measures are the responsibility of the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Very quickly, if the TRC calls to action mention UNDRIP, whose responsibility is it to ensure the calls to action are being implemented?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Certainly that is something that would be led by our department.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Very quickly, then, what have you done to ensure that call to action 92, under business and reconciliation, is implemented?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: That is something that is delegated to Minister Hajdu, but we do work together on a number of measures around economic reconciliation, including the loan guarantee program. As well, she has established a number of round tables. We also work with modern treaty organizations.

Of course, as I indicated earlier, there is a lot more work to do on that front.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Thank you.

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

We're now moving to Mr. Genuis for five minutes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

I want to talk a bit about the issue of indigenous identity fraud. Indigenous identity fraud is an act of anti-reconciliation. It shouldn't happen.

Minister Anandasangaree, you're the minister responsible for reconciliation, so this should be of particular concern to you.

Indigenous leaders have said that indigenous identity fraud is rampant. The AFN has said that substantially more than half of those benefiting from the indigenous procurement program are actually shell companies. You alluded a bit to the indigenous identity fraud issue in your opening comments. The problem is that not a single company has faced consequences for indigenous identity fraud. There have been zero consequences meted out for indigenous identity fraud, despite the fact that indigenous leaders across the board are saying this is rampant.

Do you think it's acceptable that nobody has faced consequences for indigenous identity fraud?

• (1945)

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: No.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Then why has nobody faced consequences? What do you think should be done to change that?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I believe there is an undertaking by Minister Hajdu to investigate this matter and to ensure that there is compliance. If there isn't compliance, or if there are those who have lied and who have misled in seeking procurement opportunities, then I think there should be consequences. I'm not the one to determine what they should be, but I do think there should be consequences.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I understand the difference in roles here, but you said something in your opening comments that I'll quote. You said you have "reports of this strategy being taken advantage of. This is why Indigenous Services Canada is mandated to verify the eligibility of businesses receiving contracts under the procurement strategy for indigenous businesses. These audits led to over 1,100 ...businesses being removed from the indigenous business directory."

It does seem that you are able to identify businesses that should be removed from the indigenous business directory.

Companies like the Canadian Health Care Agency have been removed from the indigenous business directory. The problem is that once they're removed, there are no further consequences. They're actually able to bid on other government contracts. It doesn't seem that you're having trouble identifying the instances where this has happened; the government is simply just choosing not to impose any consequences on them.

As a case in point, the Canadian Health Care Agency is still getting government contracts. They've been taken off the indigenous business directory, but they're still getting government contracts. Is that acceptable?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: There are three issues here. The first is the actual directory itself. If individual companies are deemed to be ineligible, first they should be removed from the directory.

Second, if they did obtain contracts as a result of falsification, then I think there should be consequences. Technically, it is a criminal act to lie on a form of that nature. There should be consequences for those who may have received contracts under false pretenses.

Third, of course, there should be a bar on those companies from receiving additional contracts from the government for a period of time.

We can disagree on what justice looks like. For me, progressive penalties are what I believe in, and I—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm interrupting you just because of the time.

I appreciate your answer, in that you've actually gone further than other ministers—Minister Duclos, for example—were willing to go in acknowledging that, yes, indigenous identity fraud is fraud, and it's criminal, and where possible, there should be criminal consequences and that people should certainly be barred from getting contracts.

How do you explain the fact that Global Health Imports, Randy Boissonnault's company, does not appear to have been referred to the RCMP, that the Canadian Health Care Agency is still able to bid on government contracts, that you have 1,100 businesses removed but nothing referred to the RCMP, and that nobody thus far has been barred from accessing government contracts? Doesn't this suggest that indigenous identity fraud just isn't being taken seriously?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I believe there are measures that need to be taken. At the outset, I said that we need to do better. I do believe that there need to be consequences for those who clearly misidentify themselves, whether that's deliberately or not.

Getting them off the list is the first of those consequences, but of course [*Inaudible—Editor*] escalate further than that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You still think Randy Boissonnault should stay in caucus.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I think I've already answered that question, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It just seems that with him, you're leaning a lot into the subjectivity and complexity aspect when he has now admitted that he's not indigenous. He's admitted that he misrepresented conversations he's had with an indigenous researcher in the past.

I do appreciate that you've gone further than your ministerial colleagues. I hope they will take up your challenge to improve on the significant failures that you've identified and that we've identified in terms of not dealing with indigenous identity fraud effectively.

• (1950)

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

We're going to our last questioner for the third round, and the last for this panel.

Mr. Carr, you have five minutes.

Mr. Ben Carr: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ministers, welcome.

Minister Anandasangaree, I'm going to direct my questions to you.

I had the opportunity to engage with Minister Hajdu very recently in the same committee on the topic that we're here to discuss, which is indigenous economic development.

A couple of the things that I know you and I have worked closely on and that the government has been tuned in to over the course of the past nine years or so in my home province of Manitoba have been very sufficiently positive and have made a substantial difference in terms of advancing that collective goal and ambition of economic reconciliation. I think of the downtown Winnipeg project that we're currently dealing with at Portage Place to convert it into a state-of-the-art health care facility. Of course, that doesn't happen without federal contributions.

There's the Bay project, on which, as you know, we're working closely with the Southern Chiefs' Organization to turn that into a very important source of housing and other cultural and historical services in an iconic building in downtown Winnipeg.

There's the national school food program. I know that the Leader of the Opposition and my colleagues across the way have referred to this as bureaucracy. They've said that no food has been served. That's, in fact, incorrect. I've been in classrooms in Manitoba with former teacher colleagues of mine, serving the food that has in fact been subsidized and funded by the federal government.

Beyond that, I think of incredibly important successes like Freedom Road, which helped to benefit the people of Shoal Lake 40 First Nation on the Manitoba-Ontario border. That has contributed to their and the surrounding area's economic development.

I think of some recent announcements that were made by you, by Minister Hajdu and by others in terms of several million dollars' worth of contributions in Manitoba that are going to help lead to the construction of new schools.

All of this being said, Minister, perhaps you can offer your own reflections about the great work we've been able to accomplish in Manitoba and how you feel those initiatives are working toward our collective goal of ensuring economic reconciliation and economic development in Manitoba.

Thank you.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you. Let me thank you for the work that you do in Manitoba.

I've been to Manitoba probably close to a dozen times in the last year and a half or so. There are three things I will add to your list.

One would be the number of agricultural benefits that we've signed in Manitoba. These are resolutions to claims that have been around for, essentially, over 100 years. I think that's very historic.

As well, the Dakota and Lakota apology that we did this summer, in July, will continue. We need to do more work in terms of addressing some disparities that exist, but certainly these are improvements that exist.

There was also the Manitoba Métis Federation self-government agreement that we signed just about two weeks ago.

We have a very important partner in Manitoba with Premier Wab Kinew. I think I'm talking about some of the positive stories, but also about doing the right thing.

I think that one of the toughest things I've had to do as a minister is around the Prairie Green landfill. As we speak, we know that the search is taking place now. That is in large measure because of the partnership and the thinking that we have with Premier Kinew.

When it comes to reconciliation, I believe that it should not be a partisan issue. It's one on which we need to work across party lines. As you know, the provincial election in Manitoba was very harmful to many and especially to the families of those who are believed to be on the site.

I want to conclude by thanking you and your colleagues from Manitoba for the great work and the advocacy you do.

Mr. Ben Carr: Thanks, Minister.

In conclusion, perhaps you can offer a comment in terms of the national school food program.

As you know, I spent many years as an educator. I was fortunate to be a teacher and a school principal. I worked with many kids who came from difficult situations, particularly indigenous communities in the northwest part of the city of Winnipeg.

Our colleagues have referred to this program as bureaucracy. Can you offer your own commentary, based on the discussions you've had and the visits that you've had to my hometown of Winnipeg, where food subsidized by the federal government is being served in classrooms?

Why do you believe this is important in ensuring success for indigenous kids in particular, when it comes to their ability to find that type of optimism, hope and success? This is inclusive, of course, of economic development later on in life if they get that early healthy start to school.

Could you quickly comment on that?

• (1955)

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: One of the organizations I worked with for many years was the Children's Breakfast Clubs in Toronto. I've been working with them for about 25 years, and I see the great work that they do.

Ultimately, it's about ensuring that young people have the nutrition, the strength—through actual meals, and the most important meal of the day—to get them through the day. This is about ensuring that food insecurity is addressed.

Affordability is a major issue for Canadians, particularly in Manitoba, and the program assists with that as well. Make no mistake: It is making a difference in the lives of young people. Ultimately, it will have a transformational impact on outcomes. As kids grow older, they will be able to retain and understand more of what they're studying, because they're not just thinking about hunger or not having enough food to eat but focusing on what's important, which is school.

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

That will conclude our panel here.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: I have Mr. Lemire on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Before we adjourn, as it is quite rare for our committee to hear from a Minister of Official Languages and it seems unlikely Ms. Petitpas Taylor will return here any time soon, I would like to take the opportunity to make her aware of something, if I may, of course.

I want to make the minister aware of the importance of learning French in indigenous communities where French is not people's first language. That is the case in my region, Abitibi-Témiscamingue, where the first nations language in the Témiscamingue region, apart from the Anishinabe language, is English.

The Red River Métis are making the same request. They would like to be able to reconnect with French, which is one of their original languages that gave rise to the Michif language later on.

It is important that French courses be offered in the indigenous communities that request them. That would be a good indication of sensitivity on the part of the government.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Chair, if you'll permit me, I would like to thank our officials for being here today. Of course, that includes our interpreters and everyone who's assisting today.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Anandasangaree, Minister Petitpas Taylor and our officials, for joining us today at this hour. Thank you for being flexible because of the timing with votes.

We are going to suspend very briefly before we welcome our next panel, the Métis Nation of Alberta.

We will restart in about five minutes.

● (1955) _____ (Pause) _____

● (2005)

The Chair: Colleagues, I call this meeting back to order.

I want to welcome all of the audience in the gallery here who are joining us tonight at this hour, but I especially want to welcome our witnesses for this panel. We have Andrea Sandmaier, president of the Métis Nation of Alberta, and we have Garrett Tomlinson, senior director, self-government, for the Métis Nation of Alberta. We extend a special welcome to you.

We'll start off with five minutes of opening remarks, after which we'll get into questions from members of the committee.

With that, I will hand the floor over to you for your opening remarks.

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier (President, Otipemisiwak Métis Government): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for inviting me to appear here today.

My name is Andrea Sandmaier, and I'm the president of the Otipemisiwak Métis Government. I'm happy to be here today with Garrett Tomlinson, our senior director of self-government.

It's an honour to share the work of the Otipemisiwak Métis Government, formerly the Métis Nation of Alberta, and to highlight the incredible strides our government has made in economic development.

Our nation stands as the oldest continuous Métis government in Canada, where economic development has always been a foundational element of our work. Prior to Confederation, it was the Métis who were the key drivers of the northwest economy, as it revolved around the fur trade. Today, many Métis are entrepreneurs, business owners and significant participants in the Canadian economy.

In Alberta, for nearly a century our Métis government has worked hard to continue promoting economic development. One example that we are exceptionally proud of is our housing initiative. Since its inception over 40 years ago, we've grown to become the largest indigenous-owned housing developer in Canada. Operated under two companies, we maintain and manage rental accommodations that currently provide affordable housing to more than 3,000 indigenous Albertans in 14 urban centres throughout Alberta. From supportive housing for seniors to programs for young families, our housing initiatives work to ensure that no one is left behind

while we compete in the open market, growing and supporting the economies of the communities we operate in.

Our government knows that economic empowerment is only possible when Métis citizens have the tools they need to succeed. The Rupertsland Institute, our education affiliate, is dedicated to advancing education, employment and training opportunities. It connects Métis citizens to meaningful employment opportunities, skills training and career development resources. Programs like these help Métis citizens move into high-demand industries, address labour market gaps and, ultimately, improve economic outcomes for Métis families.

I would like to add that our success as a government is built on the strength of our citizens and relies on the validity of our world-class citizenship registry. We have the strongest objectively verified registry system in this country. In fact, our citizenship registry is the only indigenous registry in Canada that meets the requirements set out by the Canadian Standards Association. When a citizen of the Otipemisiwak Métis Government holds up their citizenship card, we know unequivocally that this person has proven, by providing documentary evidence, that they are biologically connected to the Métis families who have made up our nation for generations.

The federal government's target of 5% indigenous procurement is an important step forward in addressing the sordid history of the country towards indigenous people, but achieving this target requires the application of equally rigorous standards to ensure it truly benefits indigenous communities. We believe that our registry offers a model for how governments can establish clear and enforceable criteria to ensure indigenous procurement contracts are awarded to legitimate Métis businesses.

As I said, our registry ensures that Métis citizenship is verified through a robust and transparent process, and to date, over 70,000 have gone through that process. By applying a similar standard of verification to indigenous procurement, governments can ensure that opportunities meant for indigenous communities are not diverted to entities with tenuous or questionable claims. Self-identification is simply not enough.

A standardized high-bar verification process would not only protect the integrity of indigenous procurement but also ensure it delivers the economic benefits it promises.

It was the Métis who built this great country 200 years ago, and we stand ready to strengthen and grow Canada's economy today.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

● (2010)

The Chair: Thank you very much, President Sandmaier.

With that, we're going into our first round of questions, the six-minute round, starting with Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you so much for being here to testify today.

One of the problems I see with the government's approach to these issues is that they lean very hard into saying that it's very complex to figure out who is and is not indigenous, and that ends up being an excuse for not taking the problem of indigenous identity fraud seriously.

Earlier in this same meeting, we talked a bit about the Métis Nation of Alberta, and some of my Liberal colleagues got very animated when I pointed out that deciding who's a member of the Métis Nation of Alberta is not subjective and that you actually have very clear and objective criteria and ways of establishing who is and is not eligible.

Could you just clarify the point? Am I correct in believing that who is or is not eligible to be a citizen of the Métis Nation of Alberta is a matter that is clear, that is objective, that can be known and that can be the basis for definitive claims made one way or the other?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: Yes. As I said in my opening remarks, our registry system is.... It's a rigorous process to become a citizen within the Métis Nation of Alberta. Upon application, you do have to provide proof of historical ancestry, biological historical ancestry, in order to get a Métis Nation of Alberta citizenship card. We know that when our citizens have their card, they meet our criteria. It's a very strict and rigorous process.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Then entirely hypothetically, if someone from Alberta was going around saying that they were Métis, but they didn't have that card—maybe they hadn't gone through the process, or maybe they had tried and had been told, “Sorry, you're not eligible”—it would be a fairly straightforward matter for someone to say that if you don't have the appropriate certification, you're either not Métis or you haven't bothered to go through the process.

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: Yes. The fact is that when an individual shows their citizenship card from the Otipemisiwak Métis Government, the public can be assured that they meet the criteria to become a Métis citizen within Alberta. Evidence-based citizenship is what our process is.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes, and I want to delve a little further into this, because a lot of the procurement abuse issues do flow from people making false claims of identity.

The government members continually come back to saying that this is complicated—that in general terms, it's complicated. How do you think we can wade through these claims of complexity to ensure programs that are designed to benefit indigenous peoples are not being taken advantage of by those who are making false claims of identity?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: I think that if the government were to apply a similar standard of verification to the indigenous procurement process, they would be able to ensure the opportunities that were meant for indigenous communities were awarded to indigenous communities.

We have within our government what's called “MétisWorks”. It is a database of Métis-owned businesses, and those businesses have

been proven to be owned by Métis citizens. We have that available already.

● (2015)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Now, from what I understand, there's no mechanism for effective ongoing communication between your business list and the government's list. The government creates their own list separately from your process, so someone could be claiming to be a Métis business from Alberta but not be on your list and still be on the government's list, and someone could be on your list but still not be recognized by the government.

What are your reflections on that? Do you think it would be a fairly straightforward matter to have the government's lists incorporate by reference the lists that are used by various rights holders across the country?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: MétisWorks is available publicly.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Right—

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

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Sorry; do I have five minutes or six?

The Chair: You have six minutes. I apologize.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: This is fairly pedantic, maybe, but I want to make sure that it's very clear to the members across from me that if the government simply took your publicly available list and incorporated that into their list, it would seem like a pretty obvious, easy and simple thing to do, and yet they don't do that. They have their own process.

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: Yes, and, as I said before, I think that if the government were to apply the same standard as we do, we wouldn't have these issues.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I think that is my time, Chair.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: I'm sorry for the mix-up there.

Next we're going to our second questioner in the first round. Mr. Battiste, you have six minutes.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Thank you, President Sandmaier. I'm happy that you didn't take up the member opposite's debate in trying to make it seem as if indigenous identity is a simple thing, especially Métis identity.

Andrea, does the Métis Nation of Alberta follow the Powley test set out by the Supreme Court of Canada in determining Métis identity?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: We do follow the national definition that the Métis National Council adopted, and so did our government. The Métis Nation of Alberta adopted the national definition many years ago.

Every registry by a Métis government is up to them. We don't have any say in anybody else's registry.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Would you say that there are differences among the different Métis organizations in terms of how they determine Métis identity?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: I would say that would be a question for other Métis governments.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Okay. It's not a simple or straightforward answer.

In my understanding of the Powley test, there are three important factors. The first is self-identification, which is a very personal thing. The next is ancestry, which, as you said, is determined biologically, and I'll come back to you on that. The third is community acceptance.

Am I correct in understanding the Powley test and the three factors?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: Yes.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Self-identity is basically someone saying, "I'm indigenous," checking a box and being able to prove that somehow.

How does the community determine community acceptance? How do you show for the Powley test that you've accepted a person into your community?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: I am going to hand that part of the question off to Mr. Tomlinson.

Mr. Garrett Tomlinson (Senior Director, Self Government, Métis Nation of Alberta): Within the Otipemisiwak Métis Government, within our citizenship act, community acceptance is defined by virtue of a citizen going through the steps to register and proving their ancestry and their identity. Upon being issued their Métis citizenship ID and the number that goes along with it, that is our view of community acceptance.

• (2020)

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Is there any way of verifying whether they've been accepted by a community? Can someone just check a box and say, "I've been accepted by this community"?

How do you verify that a person has actually been accepted by the community that they say they've been accepted by?

Mr. Garrett Tomlinson: For the Otipemisiwak Métis Government, that is the test to say that they've been verified by the community. The community is the entirety of the Métis nation within Alberta. Going through that process and submitting to the registry process that's laid out, and meeting those tests and those standards that are agreed upon by the entirety of the Métis Nation within Alberta, is the community acceptance.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Can you give us a few examples of what standards one would look at in saying, "This person is a part of my community, and this person isn't"?

Mr. Garrett Tomlinson: Sure.

Within our registry process, as you've said, there's the self-identification element. They must submit their birth records, as well as a family tree. They must submit also, if it's not already on file or on record, the original source documents that show that they are connected to the historical Métis Nation, whether those be scrip certificates, death records or marriage records that show that they do connect to the community.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: I would say that's it's kind of a subjective test when you say, "This person is part of the community. They've gone to our events. They typically participate in our community." It

wouldn't be just the one checklist identifying the factors of community acceptance. Am I correct?

Mr. Garrett Tomlinson: Andrea, do you want me to answer that?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: I.... Yes.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: I know it's a tough question. It's never been dealt with by the courts. I know the Daniels case didn't figure out what that was. I'm asking these tough questions because the Conservatives seem to think this is an easy thing to follow.

I'll move on to ancestry instead of community acceptance.

Is there a cut-off threshold? For a status Indian like me, there is a two-generation cut-off. Is there an ancestry cut-off for Métis, or can you have ancestry in perpetuity and still be on that list?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: There is not a cut-off.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Okay. There is no threshold of identity that would say, "You're just too far down the line from the original Métis." Is that correct?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: That is correct.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Okay.

We've heard from AFN and first nations communities that say, "How come one indigenous group gets a two-generation cut-off while the other gets to have their membership in perpetuity?"

I agree that there shouldn't be a cut-off, for the record.

What are your thoughts on that?

I'm sorry. I know these are complex questions, President. I'm just trying to show the complexities to my colleagues on the other side, who don't seem to understand this.

Also, I have this last question: Do you represent all Métis in Alberta, or are there different groups or factions that deal with their own things?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: We represent citizens of the Métis Nation within Alberta. We're the Otipemisiwak Métis Government. As I said earlier, we represent over 70,000 verified, registered citizens.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: However, those are not the Métis settlements of Alberta. Is that correct?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: No, we don't represent them. They are governed under their own body.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Would you say the reasons for that are simple, or would you say it's a complex thing?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: It's a complex thing.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Battiste.

[Translation]

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

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I would first like a clarification. Are you still operating as the Métis Nation of Alberta?

[English]

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: We are the Otipemisiwak Métis Government within the Métis Nation of Alberta, also known formally as the Métis nation of Alberta.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I was asking because it says on the notice of meeting that you represent the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Out of curiosity, I'd like to know why you changed the name of your organization.

[English]

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: In 2022, we ratified our constitution. It is the Otipemisiwak Métis Government Constitution. In 2023, at our election, that constitution came into force, and our government is called the Otipemisiwak Métis Government.

• (2025)

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Is your organization active within the Métis National Council?

Do you consider the Métis National Council to be an indigenous rights-holder?

[English]

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: I'm here to focus on the Otipemisiwak Métis Government. It is the Métis nation and our governments that are responsible for determining our own citizenship. I'm here today to talk about procurement and the issues that have been going around this table.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Has the court decision concerning your members affected your membership in the Métis National Council?

[English]

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: I'm not sure I understand what court decision you're speaking about.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: On March 28, 2024, the Federal Court issued a decision against the Métis Nation of Alberta ordering revisions to the agreement between the Métis Nation of Alberta and Ottawa. The decision states that the agreement is based on an overly broad definition of the people it covers and that it was reached without consultation with other Métis groups in the province.

Do you think the decision had an impact on your membership in the Métis National Council?

[English]

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: No, it has not at all made any difference.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Explain to us why the Metis Settlements General Council of Alberta, which is the central government of the eight Métis settlements in Alberta, is not affiliated with the Métis National Council or the Otipemisiwak Métis Government.

[English]

Mr. Garrett Tomlinson: I can speak to that.

The Métis settlements operate under provincial legislation in Alberta and are a creature of provincial statutes. They sit within their own legislative framework, and have for a significant period of time, whereas the Otipemisiwak Métis Government in the Métis nation of Alberta, although being the body that led to the creation of the settlements, exists under the Societies Act, within a different frame and different legislative sphere.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: In your opinion, what legitimacy does the Métis National Council currently have?

[English]

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: Again, I'm here today to talk about our government and our registry system. I didn't come here today representing the Métis National Council. I'm here today representing the Otipemisiwak Métis Government.

I'm also here with many of the elected officials under our Otipemisiwak Métis Government, and I just want to thank them right now for attending tonight and being here to support Mr. Tomlinson and me. We are here because this matters to us, and you can't speak about indigenous identity without indigenous governments at this table.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Can you give us the definition, then, of a Métis community or Métis identity?

[English]

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: Can you repeat the question, please?

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Can you give us the definition of what a Métis community or individual is, according to your organization?

[English]

Mr. Garrett Tomlinson: Sure, I can speak to that.

For individuals, a Métis citizen is identified as someone who self-identifies as Métis, someone who ancestrally connects to the historic Métis Nation and someone who then has community acceptance in accordance with our citizenship laws within the Métis Nation of Alberta and becomes registered through our registry process.

The community is defined as the Métis nation within Alberta, and that is the body and the collectivity of those citizens together residing within the provincial boundaries of Alberta at this time.

• (2030)

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemire.

[English]

Next we'll go to Ms. Idlout for six minutes.

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Qujannamiik, Iksivautaq.*

Welcome to the witnesses and the delegation that came with them. It's always good to see people come to show their support to you.

My first sets of questions will be about procurement specifically, and to learn from you what your recommendations would be to ensure that the federal government is doing a better job with the implementation of its policies.

In previous times we've been told by Minister Patty Hajdu that she had hosted an economic reconciliation table, and with that dialogue there were conversations about barriers to indigenous procurement.

I wonder about your view of federal procurement policies that support indigenous economic development and reconciliation.

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: I think the government could learn from the processes that we use to verify citizens. I think by having conversations with us about what I said earlier about our MétisWorks, which is already established—the database with verified Métis-owned businesses on it—there could be a lot more collaboration, and they could learn from how we verify our citizens and our Métis-owned businesses.

Ms. Lori Idlout: How should the existing procurement programs account for intersecting identities such as indigenous women and indigenous peoples with disabilities?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: I'll give one example of some of the programs that we offer within the Otipemisiwak Métis Government. Our Rupertsland Institute and Apeetogosan, which is our lending institution, partner and assist women entrepreneurs. We've put on different programs to help women. We had a conference two years ago, a women's entrepreneurship conference, that was very well attended. We're doing these things already within our government. We also have a program for youth who are starting businesses on the side, so we have all these programs already. Those are the kinds of things that we're doing within our government to support women and youth.

Ms. Lori Idlout: You've partially answered a question that I was going to ask you, but I'm going to ask you anyway to give you another opportunity to respond.

How can various levels of government ensure that indigenous businesses have the capacity and support needed to participate in government-led procurement processes?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: Again, we are doing that work through our government. Most recently, this fall, we held two procurement workshops for Métis-owned businesses that are registered already with our MétisWorks program, and people came out. We had one in Edmonton and one in Calgary, and they were very well attended. Citizens were able to learn about the tools and resources that are available for the procurement program through the government.

We're going to continue to support our entrepreneurs in Alberta with whatever kinds of programs we're developing. We're right now doing consultation with citizens and entrepreneurs on our own economic reconciliation strategy. Right now we don't yet have sustainable funding to develop programs that are sustainable, so we're working with Canada at tables to talk about things like that.

• (2035)

Ms. Lori Idlout: Thank you so much.

I do have a bit more of an awkward question, given that Randy Boissonnault had initially said that he was Cree and then became Métis. Then he said that he was adopted by a Cree family, and now he's telling us that the family that adopted him, his mother and brother, are part of the Métis Nation of Alberta. Can you verify that?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: Our registry is confidential. It's in our citizenship law within our Otipemisiwak Métis Government.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Okay.

I have one final question. You mentioned that MétisWorks is public. Would any of the affiliations that Randy Boissonnault has claimed be on that registry list?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: I don't know that.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Okay. Thank you.

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

That concludes our first round of questioning. We're going to move into the second round here.

First we'll go to Mr. Schmale for five minutes.

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

Thank you very much to our witnesses for appearing. We always appreciate this testimony.

I didn't catch that last question from Ms. Idlout, but maybe I could ask you, Madam President, if Randy Boissonnault is currently a member of the MNA.

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: Our registry is confidential. It is part of our citizenship law within our Otipemisiwak Métis Government.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Okay.

When we're talking about the MNA verifying eligibility for businesses claiming to be of Métis status, whether legitimate or otherwise, and they're trying to access the set-asides for indigenous contracts, are there checks and balances to ensure a fraud-free environment?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: In order for Métis businesses to be listed on our Alberta MétisWorks database, they must have their Métis Nation of Alberta citizenship card. They've gone through the rigorous process that we've laid out tonight already.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: That's perfect. That's good to know.

Maybe you could potentially, if you care to, expand on what the MNA offers to its citizens to help with programs and services. Perhaps you could talk about navigating the various procurement opportunities or even about the complex application process.

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: As I had said when Lori asked her question about that, we actually just recently did two procurement workshops with Métis businesses that are registered on Alberta MétisWorks and we are working towards our own economic reconciliation strategy. Of course, we are working with Canada on a nation-to-nation basis and are at tables with Canada to talk about different funding we can access so that we can support our citizens when they are starting a business or when we are doing any kind of program when it comes to entrepreneurship,

We have some programming now. As I said earlier, we have Apeetogosan, which is our lending arm. Rupertsland Institute offers training and workshops for entrepreneurs, and we continue to expand all of those.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I should have asked this off the top, but I did ask it of the ministers in the last round. I asked them if claiming indigenous status was wrong, and they agreed. I'm assuming you do as well.

What kind of hurt did it cause within your nation, knowing what Randy Boissonnault did and knowing the events that led up to his ousting from cabinet?

• (2040)

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: False claims of Métis ancestry most definitely harm our communities and stand to undermine our nationhood. We take these things very seriously. We take our registry very seriously and take our identity very seriously. We know who we are. We know who our citizens are, and we're proud of the registry that we have.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Regarding the safeguards, if any, that the government put into place to protect against businesses or individuals falsely claiming indigenous identity in order to secure contracts that are set aside for indigenous peoples, do you think the government has taken enough action already to ensure that the list is as true as possible?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: I think that if the government were to apply a simple standard of verification to its indigenous procurement processes, it would be able to ensure that opportunities that are for indigenous communities are going to those communities.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Tell me a bit more about that measure. How do you see it playing out if it were to be implemented?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: Our citizenship registry offers a model for how governments can establish clear and enforceable measures.

The Chair: I'm afraid, Mr. Schmale, that the time has elapsed there.

With that, we'll have to move on to our next questioner, Mr. McLeod. You have five minutes, please.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Welcome to our witnesses. It's good to see a big delegation of indigenous visitors here in Ottawa.

When the Daniels case was concluded, I went to my father, who was already around 80 years old, and I told him, "Hey, the court case is done. We won." He looked at me and said, "I don't really give a shit. I don't need the government to tell me who I am." Those words stuck with me. I thought about it for a long time.

He talked about how people were divided, how Métis are divided all across the country into different categories and little boxes. Many people believe that it's a strategy by the government to keep the Métis down. If all the different families worked together in all the different provinces and were allowed to connect, we'd be a very powerful organization.

In the Northwest Territories, there are different classifications. They are called indigenous Métis. They're Métis who can trace their ancestry to the Métis scrip signing or the treaty signing, because some Métis took the treaty status. There are the non-indigenous Métis who moved in from another part of the country. There are Métis that just self-identify as Métis. There are the community acceptance Métis. They are people who lived amongst the Métis and became accepted by the community.

In my life, I started as a young kid as a half-breed. I became a Métis and was recognized as aboriginal. Now I'm indigenous, so I'm not sure if I'm climbing up or it's just a matter of more terms. If you want government to recognize you, it's not easy being recognized as a Métis. If you're a status Indian, there is the Indian Act membership list that is tracked. Babies are born or listed. The Métis don't have that kind of list.

Maybe I could get you to talk a bit about the differences. How hard is it to track who's on your list? How hard is it to sign people up? I know with us, we have to do enrolments. You have to trace your ancestry. We have to dig up family trees. We have to go back generations to make sure everybody who says who they are is actually who they are. It's not easy.

In some land claims, the negotiations only have one enrolment officer. It could take 10 years just to verify who they are. By that time, half of them have passed on, but you have to keep going. It's not an easy process.

Could you just touch on the verification process that you talked about, versus what the Indian Act provides?

• (2045)

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: As part of our process, individuals have to meet the national definition of "Métis" and submit an application with various documents, including a family tree, a birth certificate, identification, proof of registry and a source of documents showing biological connection to historic Métis ancestry, such as a scrip document, a baptismal certificate, a marriage certificate or death records and things like this.

Our registry is very robust, and we have amazing genealogists who work in our registry department. We have an amazing historical record of families that are connected within our nation, an amazing library of connections.

It is not an easy process to become a citizen of the Métis nation within Alberta. It can take months. It can take up to a year and sometimes even a little bit longer if we don't have records already, but we have more than 70,000 people registered as citizens of the Métis nation within Alberta, so our documents are very robust.

It's not an easy process, and we have lots of checks and balances. As I said in my opening remarks, our registry meets the Canadian Standards Association. We've gone through that process and have been audited by the Canadian Standards Association. You could come in—you can't, because it's very confidential, but I'm just saying this facetiously—and grab a file out of our registry and all of the documents would be there. It's verified citizenship.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. McLeod. I'm afraid the time has elapsed.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Thank you.

[Translation]

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

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

You are justified in keeping the registry confidential. You don't have to disclose to the general public who your members are.

However, would the government still have access to the registry when deciding whether or not to award a contract to a company?

Who actually has access to the registry? Is it just you? Do third parties have access?

[English]

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: Under our Otipemisiwak Métis Government Citizenship Act, the registry itself is confidential. MétisWorks is entirely different. MétisWorks is a database of Métis-owned businesses that have already been verified. The owners of those businesses have already been verified as Métis citizens, and it is a public database.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: From our perspective, how do we recognize an organization that you recognize as legitimate? Obviously, I believe that first nations are part of the solution and that a registry that may be created by and for them must include recognized Métis. However, I would like to get your perspective as to how it can work if everything is confidential.

How can we ensure that you won't recognize fake Métis and that they won't have access to a contract, if the general public doesn't have access to that list?

What are the checks and balances?

• (2050)

[English]

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: If they have a Métis Nation of Alberta citizenship card, they're Métis. They've gone through the process that we've outlined several times tonight.

As I said in answering your last question, the MétisWorks database is our database that we own. We have verified that the

Métis businesses that are on that database are owned by Métis Nation of Alberta citizens.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Our role is to verify whether public funds are being properly invested. How can we fulfill our role? Do we simply ask people who received the contract to show their card? Is that what you're recommending?

[English]

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: You could. Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: That's great.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemire.

[English]

With that, we'll go to the last questioner in our third panel.

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

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Qujannamiik.*

Just very quickly, understanding that you've had a lot of experience accepting or rejecting people who want to be included in your membership list as Métis, could you share with us the percentage of applicants you've identified as being fraudulent or not Métis?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: I don't think we have those numbers with us.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Have you had to reject any applicants?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: Of course. Yes.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Would you at a later point be willing to share in a written response the numbers—not the people, just the numbers—of those who tried to apply to be part of MNA and whom you've had to reject?

Ms. Andrea Sandmaier: Yes. I can ask our registrar for that information.

Ms. Lori Idlout: I'm done, Chair.

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

That concludes our third panel.

I want to sincerely thank Ms. Sandmaier and Mr. Tomlinson not just for appearing and for being witnesses this evening but also for being flexible and appearing at this hour, given the delays we had with votes.

I also want to thank all of our audience for being here today to witness this.

Before we wrap up, I know that Mr. Schmale had a question he wanted to ask.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Thank you, Chair.

I just want to continue the conversation we were having off-line. It's more to fill in the rest of the committee members who might not have been part of that. It was in regard to the business partners of Mr. Boissonnault listed in the order. I know there was some difficulty in trying to track them down.

Perhaps you, or the clerk through you, could give this committee an update on where that location process currently stands.

The Chair: We could, absolutely. Madam Clerk, go ahead.

Ms. Nancy Vohl (Procedural Clerk): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Malachie and I have been actively working on trying to find Felix Papineau and Shawna Parker. We do have different email addresses. We do have phone numbers. We do have a potential social media account, which is not especially reliable. We do have emails and phone numbers. We did send emails. We did leave voice mails, quite a few, and had no answer back.

At this point, there is nothing the clerk can do to pass on the invitation if the person doesn't get back to us. We have been actively working with the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms and also the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel to see other avenues to be in touch and actually be successful at getting in touch with the two persons mentioned.

The Chair: I want to quickly go to Mr. Genuis, who might want to make a quick point on this too.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes. I have a couple of questions on that.

My understanding is that there's a House order for them to appear, which means that the Sergeant-at-Arms can already take steps to have them appear. Maybe you can clarify that.

Second, have you been in touch with Randy Boissonnault or with his office? He may have some information about how to find his former business associates.

I mean, if they're trying to hide from us, that makes your job more difficult. Mr. Boissonnault may know something. Obviously, the Sergeant-at-Arms will have additional tools.

• (2055)

Ms. Nancy Vohl: We do have information on how to contact them. We do have emails, as I said. We do have phone numbers.

Voice mails were left. Emails were sent. If they don't get back to us, we cannot move on with the process.

We have been in touch with the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms and with the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel. At this point, that's where we're at. We are looking at other ways to find them. As a general clerk who is not a private investigator... We're just procedural clerks. We are looking at options or tools that they may have access to that I do not as a procedural clerk.

This is where we're at.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Can I just follow up with a quick question, then?

I understand that your role is not the same as that of the Sergeant-at-Arms, but does the House order provide the Sergeant-at-Arms with the tools to compel their appearance, given that we have a House order?

Ms. Nancy Vohl: Well, there is the motion of the House, and of this committee. There are also other motions at other committees, which may be different. For example, my committee has an order to summon the two individuals. This is why I'm also here with Malachie, and this is where we are at now.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'll just put on the record that it would be a bit crazy if an order of the House of Commons stopped at, "Well, we sent an email and they didn't reply."

They have to appear. I think members agreed that they have to appear. I understand that everybody has a different role within this place in terms of what they can do, but we would be making a mockery of our institutions if we just accepted that you could not reply to an email and that's your way to avoid accountability. That doesn't even work for library books, let alone summonses to committees.

Ms. Nancy Vohl: That is why we are still actively working on this. Trust me; we are.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I will see you tomorrow morning. The meeting is adjourned.

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