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Chair: Terry Sheehan



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• (0815)

[English]

The Chair (Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie—Algoma, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 19 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

We recognize that we meet on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on February 3, 2026, the committee is commencing its study on the subject matter of clause 572, division 35 of Bill C-15. As you recall, that is in regard to the letter we received from Karina Gould, the finance chair, requesting that.

Before I go too far, just remember for interpretation, when you're not speaking, to make sure that your mic is off and that your earpiece is away from the mic so that it's not hard on our interpreters.

I would like to welcome our witnesses.

Good morning and welcome, Honourable Rebecca Alty, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations. It's good to see you. Thank you for responding so quickly to the motion passed on Monday.

Also from the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, we have the deputy minister, Valerie Gideon. Thank you very much and it's good to see you. We also have Manon Nadeau-Beaulieu, chief of finances, results and delivery officer; Élizabéth Pigeon, director general, modern treaty implementation; and Benoît Chartrand, manager.

From the Department of Justice, we have Julia Redmond, legal counsel, negotiations and northern affairs.

From the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, we have Jolene Dione, director, indigenous police services division.

Thank you very much.

Minister, you have five minutes.

Hon. Rebecca Alty (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations): Good morning, and thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

[Translation]

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to speak to the committee about Bill C-15, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on November 4, 2025, in particular our proposal to repeal sections 195 and 196 of the Naskapi and the Cree-Naskapi Commission Act.

We have included these provisions in the Budget Implementation Act because they meet a specific request and a clear need. Once in effect, the changes we're making will provide clarity regarding the Naskapi Police's authorities on Naskapi lands, and will update funding arrangements so that they better reflect the nation's current needs and new agreement.

• (0820)

I am happy to inform the committee that these changes are fully supported by the Naskapi nation.

[English]

These changes are part of a broader effort by Canada's government to advance self-determination and to build indigenous prosperity by ensuring that indigenous partners have the resources and tools to make the decisions that matter to them. Budget 2025 reflects this effort.

Another example of how we are doing this is through proposed amendments to the First Nations Fiscal Management Act. This change would allow the First Nations Finance Authority to lend to special purpose vehicles, SPVs, which are first nations project financing corporations created by first nations to support participation in major economic and resource development projects. This would make it easier for communities to work together to reduce administrative barriers and to access affordable, reliable capital through an indigenous financial institution.

[Translation]

Better access to financing supports equity participation, job creation, and long-term economic growth for indigenous communities.

We're also expanding tools for building indigenous infrastructure. Budget 2025 raises the Canada Infrastructure Bank's target for indigenous infrastructure from \$1 billion to \$3 billion.

[English]

It's a step but not the final step towards ensuring that the energy, transportation and broadband infrastructure indigenous people need gets built.

At the same time, we're doubling the indigenous loan guarantee program from \$5 billion to \$10 billion. Communities have been clear that equity matters and access to affordable financing is essential. This expansion responds directly to that call. As we all know, financing alone doesn't build prosperity. Benefits need to flow directly into communities and not around them. If contractors can't bid on the work in their own communities, opportunity stops at the gate.

That's why budget 2025 proposes a bonding and surety pilot program to address a barrier that has kept too many first nations contractors out of running for major infrastructure projects.

[Translation]

With this program, more first nations businesses can bid on construction and infrastructure work, create local jobs and keep more economic benefits in the community.

[English]

Each of these changes may seem small on its own, but together they tell a much bigger story. They reflect a shift in how we work, away from one-size-fits-all solutions, towards indigenous-led decision-making rooted in self-determination. By working directly with partners, advancing self-government agreements, putting action behind our commitments and making targeted changes where they're needed, we're putting in place the building blocks for a more resilient future for indigenous peoples across this country. At the end of the day, our government fundamentally believes that promoting self-determination is essential to building indigenous prosperity and advancing reconciliation.

[Translation]

To that end, we are also making critical investments to improve how we consult with indigenous partners. Budget 2025 provides \$10.1 million for the federal initiative on consultation.

[English]

This funding will support the co-development of consultation protocols with indigenous rights holders so that consultations on projects are not only clear and respectful but also meet or exceed legal and constitutional requirements. These protocols set shared expectations, reduce uncertainty and support our efforts to renew relationships with indigenous peoples by deepening our understanding of community perspectives and priorities.

Whether it's the policies in the budget or whether it's the work I do every day as Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, our goal is straightforward—a Canada where indigenous partners have the tools to lead, and where communities can invest, build and benefit from the projects that affect their lands and futures.

Mr. Chair, our government is taking practical steps to build reconciliation in partnership with indigenous peoples, and we will continue to work with first nations, Inuit and Métis, and modern self-

government and treaty partners to advance indigenous-led initiatives and promote self-determination.

As we move forward and build a stronger, more resilient future for this country, we are equally determined to build a fairer, more equitable one. We are building a Canada where reconciliation is lived every day through shared decision-making and shared benefits.

● (0825)

[Translation]

I encourage all members here today to support the budget.

I look forward to answering any questions you might have

Meegwetch, thank you, *mashi cho*.

[English]

The Chair: *Chi-meegwetch*, Minister.

Let's now go to the first round. The Conservatives are first for six minutes. We will start with MP Schmale, please.

Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes, CPC): Thank you, Minister. It's always a pleasure to have you here.

Minister, a few months ago, Thomson Reuters released a report showing some pretty dire numbers when it comes to missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. The study cites that despite being indigenous people being only 5% of the population, indigenous women and girls account for over 50% of these trafficking victims. It also shows that in 124 cases, 67% of the victims are still missing, with the average age being 30.

It also shows that a large number of these human trafficking incidents are happening in some major cities. That's where we are seeing some pretty significant increases in crime, extortion and anything to that effect, daily.

When are we going to actually see some action on fixing the revolving door that seems to have become our justice system, have some real penalties for these offenders and stop releasing criminals back onto the streets?

Hon. Rebecca Alty: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a very important issue. We are actually holding an indigenous, federal, provincial and territorial round table on the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls next week. I will circulate the agenda to committee members if they haven't received it yet. We would appreciate your presence there.

There are a number of initiatives the government is working on. There are a number of crime bills, which you mentioned, that relate to making sure that victims are supported and that strengthen bail reforms.

I would encourage members to support those laws. There's also—

Jamie Schmale: We have talked for many years on this side of the House about how the changes to the justice system have harmed individuals, whether indigenous or non-indigenous. We're looking at these numbers, which are pretty dire, especially when you look at the number of indigenous women going missing.

Are you putting resources...? The missing and murdered indigenous women and girls report came out a number of years ago. What concrete steps have you taken, other than having a round table, to actually fund some task forces in law enforcement to look into these cases, find these women and girls and bring them home?

Hon. Rebecca Alty: Yes, there are two parts. The first part is what I was mentioning, ensuring that all members support the crime bills. The other is prevention, making sure that we have the funding in the budget to advance initiatives that support prevention as well as healing.

There are a number of initiatives. I was in Iqaluit in November and had the great opportunity to see the healing centre there, which is the truth and reconciliation call to action number 21. That's set to open in April.

In January, I was in Fort Providence. With funding from ISC, it is building a 60-bed transitional and emergency shelter for women and families. Due to weather, the units hadn't arrived the week I was there; however, it is—

Jamie Schmale: That's good.

We need to see concrete action, so that when criminals are arrested, they are put in jail. We need tougher sentences. We need bail reform. We need investments in law enforcement. In this case, we're specifically talking about an indigenous police service in Quebec.

Where are the concrete steps? It's great that you're talking about recovery, but what are we doing to deter and punish those responsible?

Hon. Rebecca Alty: Exactly, so that was in my first round of answers.

Ginette Lavack (St. Boniface—St. Vital, Lib.): I have a point of order regarding relevance.

Jamie Schmale: The missing and murdered indigenous women and girls report is within Crown-Indigenous Relations.

The Chair: Hold on.

[*Translation*]

Marilène Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan, BQ): Mr. Chair, I'd like the microphone to be turned on so the interpreters can do their job.

Ginette Lavack: My apologies. I was saying that the question was put to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, but the issue is more related to justice.

[*English*]

The Chair: The depth of the question would be for, perhaps, Public Safety or whatnot. We do have someone from Public Safety, as well, if she wishes to—

Jamie Schmale: No, I'd like the minister to respond, because the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls report was done by Crown-Indigenous Relations.

• (0830)

The Chair: She has answered a little bit, but if you want more in-depth stuff—

Jamie Schmale: I'll ask another question.

Minister, we met a few months ago regarding missing art and, of course, it was misplaced arts...We can't call it missing. It's still not found, but we refuse to call it missing, so let's go with misplaced art.

Your ministry has refused to provide details with regard to what actual pieces have gone missing. Why?

Hon. Rebecca Alty: Thank you, and I appreciate the question.

This is important. One piece is too much, but as you know, those pieces were from the loan program that has been discontinued. There were a number that were duplicate entries. Therefore, they weren't misplaced. Some were located. If you'd like, I can get the deputy minister to speak to that.

Jamie Schmale: I've got notification here that your department is refusing to release the names of the pieces that are still missing.

I'd like to know from you, Minister, why you haven't released that despite an Access to Information Act request.

Hon. Rebecca Alty: If you'd like, I can get the deputy minister to respond to that.

Jamie Schmale: Okay, maybe I'll get to her in just a second.

Maybe I can bounce over to this question.

Minister, do you believe that two exclusive rights can coexist at the same time, specifically with regard to land, aboriginal title and fee simple property?

Hon. Rebecca Alty: That one is before the court, so I'll let that—

Jamie Schmale: I'm just asking in general.

Hon. Rebecca Alty: Yes. As the matter is before the court, I'll let that—

Jamie Schmale: There are others that aren't. In the wild imagination, do they still coexist or can they be separate?

Hon. Rebecca Alty: As the matter is before the court, I'll let the courts—

Jamie Schmale: I didn't specify a case. I specified generally.

Hon. Rebecca Alty: No, but that's a matter before the court, so I'll let the courts—

Jamie Schmale: There are many matters before the courts. There are tons of land claims. I just asked in general.

Hon. Rebecca Alty: The matter is before the court.

Jamie Schmale: You're refusing to answer a general question.

Let's move this forward. If you and your government expect to attract investment into this country to build our infrastructure, minerals or whatever, how can we do that when there's no clear direction from the federal government on the exclusive ownership of land, especially in British Columbia?

The Chair: That's all the time we have right now. Thank you very much.

Jamie Schmale: No, Chair. I was interrupted by points of order. It's 6:08 here on my clock. Mr. Morin's been timing. You kept the clock running for the point of order. I am actually on—

The Chair: I had him keeping—

Jamie Schmale: Did you stop the clock for the points of order? How did we get the difference? I didn't see you stop it.

The Chair: We stopped it. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lavack, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ginette Lavack: Thank you very much for joining us, Minister, and thank you for your remarks.

I'd like to switch gears and go in a different direction.

In your statement, you mentioned housing, homelessness and the importance of infrastructure investments.

We know that housing and homelessness are ongoing challenges for indigenous peoples. Our indigenous partners have already reacted to the budget and said this funding will help their communities.

Can you tell us more about how housing will help communities, not only in terms of homelessness, but also in other areas?

Hon. Rebecca Alty: Housing is a major issue everywhere in Canada, in indigenous and non-indigenous communities. The budget proposes \$2.8 billion for indigenous communities as part of the urban, rural and northern indigenous housing strategy. Started a few years ago, this project has been very successful thanks to direct contributions to indigenous governments. I represent the Northwest Territories riding. I see houses being built, and they're being built quickly because the funds from the federal government are going to indigenous governments. They buy the houses, and the houses are built in the community.

This strategy is a major initiative. However, we know we need more than just funds for building homes; we also need funding for infrastructure, and there are two other major projects in the budget to support that.

First, the investment in water and waste water infrastructure on reserve.

Second, in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut and many other communities in Canada, where most of the population is indigenous, communities that are not a reserve will receive infrastructure money under the Canada community-building fund.

The budget proposes an increase for that as well. So there is money for housing, but also for infrastructure that enables more housing to be built in the communities.

• (0835)

Ginette Lavack: In this budget, the government is moving forward with its plan to launch a bonding and surety backstop pilot project to help first nations communities. According to the First Nations Finance Authority, this investment reflects a clear recognition of the systematic inequities that exist and, more importantly, shows a commitment to addressing this disparity through meaningful policy reform and by empowering first nations-led institutions.

Can you explain how this will help first nations communities?

Hon. Rebecca Alty: This pilot project is really significant. As I just explained about funds for building houses and infrastructure, such as drinking water infrastructure, it's important that businesses on reserve and in indigenous communities have the opportunity to bid on these projects. Under the current version of the Indian Act, these companies cannot offer bonds or surety backstops. This is a pilot project. The important thing is that there are funds for businesses.

[*English*]

They can use that to back their bid. Once the project is complete, that money gets released back into the pot and another company would be able to use that to bid on a project. It's really important to be able to increase the business opportunities on reserve, so that it's not just infrastructure being built on reserve; it's also community-led businesses building that infrastructure.

[*Translation*]

Ginette Lavack: I'd like to ask you one last question.

Earlier, we talked about missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. I was in Winnipeg when it was announced the indigenous community had written a report on the matter, which included recommendations. It's the Giganawenimaanaanig report. This report reflects how important it is for governments to work together. It is the responsibility of the provincial and territorial governments as well as the federal government to address this issue.

Could you expand on that a little bit? How do you see that?

[English]

Hon. Rebecca Alty: We're doing a whole session on that next week at the indigenous-federal-provincial-territorial, IFPT, meeting. That is the opportunity for Winnipeg and Manitoba to share their work on that and for the other provinces, territories and federal government to talk about how this could roll and how this could look in their area.

In the budget, there's also some work with public emergency preparedness, so there might be some opportunities to work together.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Make sure you circulate the invitation that you mentioned to the committee.

Next we have MP Gill for six minutes, please.

[Translation]

Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for joining us Minister, and thank you for agreeing to meet with us so quickly.

First of all, as the MP for Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nissassinan, I must tell you that the Naskapi lands and the Naskapi nation are in my riding.

The purpose of today's meeting is theoretically to study the bill. Obviously, repeal is simply a matter of making sure everything is aligned. We therefore support this measure. It could be as simple as that, I must say. Chief Nattawapio and the chief of police, Mr. Moffat, both of whom also appeared before the Senate, sent a letter supporting this measure, and Quebec supports it as well, so there you go.

I'm going to make a brief aside. As a member of Parliament, I see all the violence going on in my own riding. I talked to the Uashat-Maliotenam police service about everything that's going on. We're talking about human trafficking, drugs and street gangs, among other things. This is something widespread in our communities. I know the committee is also studying the issue of indigenous police forces. Obviously, all the communities in my riding want indigenous police forces to be recognized as an essential service.

I may be a Bloc member, but I admit that providing funds suited to the realities of a territory that is quite different is a step in the right direction. I've been to Kawawachikamach many times. That's the first thing I wanted to mention.

I'd like to ask you a question that was raised by the Naskapi themselves regarding the Cree-Naskapi Commission where there are three vacancies. We know you received applications last September. Like the Naskapi, I wonder when these positions will be filled, given that they're essential to the delivery of police services.

Thank you.

• (0840)

Hon. Rebecca Alty: I admit it's a long process, and we want to slow it down.

Marilène Gill: You mean that you want to speed up the process.

Hon. Rebecca Alty: We want to speed it up, exactly; we don't want to slow it down at all, quite the opposite. We want to speed up

the process, because it's important to have people in place, otherwise, it slows down service delivery.

Ms. Pigeon, do you have anything to add?

Élizabeth Pigeon (Director General, Modern Treaty Implementation, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs): Actually, it's the parties themselves who nominate commissioners. We received the applications a few months ago. The process of appointing commissioners is under way so that everything will be back on track in the coming months. As the minister said, it's a fairly lengthy process, but we have everything needed within the federal process to make appointments.

Marilène Gill: Thank you.

We were just wondering, because there's no time limit either. Obviously, we want this to be settled quickly. What is the usual time frame? Why is there no deadline to appoint these people?

Hon. Rebecca Alty: It's hard to say, because we ask our partners to give us names, and that can take time. We're going to look at the entire government process to find ways to speed things up. We could take note of your question and see if the system allows us to speed up the process. Once we receive the applications, either me or the deputy minister, things move quickly. We'll look at the entire process and give you more information on that.

Marilène Gill: My last question is about your mandate.

You talked about many portfolios and you also defended the budget. However, I'd like to focus on your work. Obviously, all the ministers were given a mandate that gives them some latitude. You all got the same mandate letter.

What are your priorities? Based on the budget, I could venture a guess, but it's a bit more difficult when it comes to Crown-indigenous relations. Other ministers have told us that they're relatively free to set their own objectives. That said, based on your mandate, what would be your priorities regarding Crown-indigenous relations? What do you intend to put forward?

Hon. Rebecca Alty: I have many priorities, but one regularly stands out when I talk with partners, and that is speeding up the conditions to reserve process. In fact, it's in Budget 2025.

The process, which was already in place when I took the position, will be evaluated. We organized a lot of meetings with first nations across Canada, and we asked them their opinion on how we can speed up the process. We received a lot of feedback, as well as applications for new positions that would be held by indigenous people. That would be one way to do it.

That's one of my top priorities. We've taken steps to speed up the process, but we also want to look at how we can do it in the future, when I no longer hold this position. How do we make sure it remains a speedy process?

• (0845)

Marilène Gill: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: For the Conservatives now, we have MP Zimmer.

You have the floor for five minutes, please.

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

Thank you, Minister, for coming to committee today.

We're here talking specifically about amendments to Bill C-15, as you know. The particular section I want to focus on talks about "agreements to receive external policing services" being repealed. We just recently had a study about indigenous policing. One thing that became abundantly clear was resources were very sparse, very limited, and many of them said that they weren't going to participate in your Liberal confiscation of firearms.

This limits the police force in this situation even more so. Do you support using sparse resources to go after law-abiding firearms owners' firearms?

Hon. Rebecca Alty: Are you talking about sections 195 and 196?

Bob Zimmer: I'm talking about section 196 specifically.

Hon. Rebecca Alty: I think the repealing of this section is important. It's administrative. There's nothing that changes on the day-to-day....

Bob Zimmer: Maybe just answer my question, then. Instead of getting into the nuances of the legislation, I asked you specifically whether you support using sparse police resources, especially in communities, to take away law-abiding firearms owners' firearms? It's related to section 196.

Hon. Rebecca Alty: It's not related to section 196.

Bob Zimmer: It is, because it says it's going to limit the ability to receive external policing services. One thing the public safety minister said was that in going to collect law-abiding firearms owners' firearms, they're going to get police officers who are possibly retired, and bring in these external forces, because there's such a lack of police resources in communities. This is limiting that ability to do that. That's why I'm asking you if you support using limited police resources to go after law-abiding firearms owners' firearms.

Hon. Rebecca Alty: Thank you.

As the deputy mentioned, the chief of the Naskapi, as well as the chief of police, did appear before the Senate earlier this week.

Bob Zimmer: I'm actually asking about firearms specifically.

Just answer the question, Minister, and I'll move on to my next one. If you don't want to answer, just say so.

Hon. Rebecca Alty: I'm sorry, but I am answering.

Section 196—

Bob Zimmer: I'm asking if you support using—

The Chair: Just let her try and answer the question, because I don't know where she's going—

Bob Zimmer: She's not. She's tried this three or four times where she's delivered that answer to the question—

The Chair: She's only had a couple of seconds to answer. Just let her try and answer it for the first bit, please.

Bob Zimmer: Okay, go ahead.

Hon. Rebecca Alty: Section 196 is to avoid inconsistencies with the new provisions of the Northeastern Quebec Agreement.

Bob Zimmer: I'm not hearing an answer yet, so....

I'm asking her about—

The Chair: Hold on just a minute. I can't make that determination because she's not finished.

Hon. Rebecca Alty: Again, I asked if you were talking about section 196—

Bob Zimmer: I am, and it talks about agreements to receive external policing services, and then I asked whether you support using those limited services. Do you support using those limited resources to go after law-abiding firearm owners' firearms?

Maybe more specifically, Minister, you're from a very rural place, the Northwest Territories. Members of the committee, like your previous representative Mr. McLeod and the member from Yukon who's in this meeting currently, courageously voted against your government's ability to confiscate law-abiding firearm owners' firearms, ones they hunt with to provide sustenance for their families.

Do you support the gun confiscation program of your Liberal government, yes or no?

Hon. Rebecca Alty: Thank you. That's a different question from your first one, so I appreciate that.

The expert panel, that's who provides the recommendations—

Bob Zimmer: A yes-or-no question is what I'm asking you. I'm asking you, as an MP—

The Chair: Let her answer. I can't make that determination.

Bob Zimmer: She's not answering it. It's a yes-or-no question. It takes five seconds to say yes or no.

Hon. Rebecca Alty: I support expert panels that consult with indigenous communities and indigenous elders, which is what the last expert panel did, and the—

Bob Zimmer: Okay, so getting back—

Hon. Rebecca Alty: —panel didn't recommend the SKS, as many indigenous hunters use that—

Bob Zimmer: The Weatherby Mark V is on there, and there are shotguns and twenty-twos that are actually on the list.

Like I said before, the previous member for Northwest Territories, Michael McLeod, voted against it. We even had a chat afterwards and he said, "Yeah, Bob, they don't think we use these rifles to hunt with," but he said, "We use them to hunt buffalo."

Even Dr. Hanley voted against it for similar reasons, because you come from very hunting-centric communities.

I'm asking you a simple question, but maybe I'll make it a bit more blunt.

If it comes to a vote to support confiscation of law-abiding firearm owners' firearms that they use to hunt, are you going to vote for your constituents or are you going to vote for your government?

• (0850)

Hon. Rebecca Alty: Thank you.

I think I would look to former Conservative justice minister Kim Campbell, who said in 1991 that it's important to regulate the types of firearms associated with the greatest risk to public safety—

Bob Zimmer: I didn't hear an answer there. I'm going to move on to my next question.

Ginette Lavack: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Rebecca Alty: —and relatively few, if any, legitimate sporting uses.

The other one that is a good one is from 2012. Former prime minister Harper—

Bob Zimmer: Can you the pause the time?

I'm going to move on, because you're clearly not answering the question, and I know why. It's because—

The Chair: MP Zimmer—

Hon. Rebecca Alty: No, I did answer the question—

The Chair: Hold on, hold on.

Bob Zimmer: She's not answering the question, Chair. It's clear.

The Chair: I have a point of order that I wish to hear.

Bob Zimmer: Yes.

Ginette Lavack: The witness should have an equal amount of time to respond to the question as the member took to ask the question.

Bob Zimmer: No, it's actually my time. That's how it works.

The Chair: First of all, let's take a deep breath, because I want to make sure we respect the interpreters. It's very difficult when people are doing this, and it's hard on their health, so please....

Bob Zimmer: With respect, Chair—

The Chair: I'll allow the minister to—

Bob Zimmer: —it's "ou" or "non" for the interpreters. It is a simple yes-or-no question.

The Chair: I'm going to turn to the minister, please. I stopped the clock during the point of order. We will continue now. Allow the minister to—

Bob Zimmer: I'm going to move on to my next question.

The Chair: All right, ask your next question, then.

Bob Zimmer: Not that long ago, the Prime Minister said, "Canadians will hold [us to] account by their experience at the grocery store, when they're paying their electricity bill, when they or their children are looking for a place to live."

That's what the Prime Minister said.

I have a bill from Steve from Yellowknife, and for one month alone, from November 26 to December 29—it's going to shock most of us in the room—it was \$882 for an electrical bill.

Is that affordable, Minister?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Hon. Rebecca Alty: No, and that's why we are introducing measures like the groceries and essentials benefit.

The other thing I would point to in the recent announcement, which I'm hoping the Conservatives will support, is the \$20-million food infrastructure fund, which includes supports for harvesters. There's a great study that shows \$50 invested in hunters is actually able to feed 20 families, versus \$50 invested in imported meat that only supports 3.3 individuals.

There's work to do in regard to electricity, and we'll be working with the territorial government on that.

Thank you.

The Chair: We're going to MP Hanley.

Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you, officials, for appearing.

I want to just come back to the subject of indigenous policing, specifically around this proposed legislative change. We've heard general support for the change, including, most importantly, from the Naskapi Nation.

Can you go into a bit more detail on how this will actually affect the delivery of policing services for the Naskapi Nation, given that we have just had a study on indigenous policing? It's a very important study and we're looking forward to those recommendations. My question is in that general context of the delivery of policing services for the nation.

Hon. Rebecca Alty: I'm happy to speak about sections 195 and 196 that we're looking to repeal. As mentioned, the chief and the chief of police were at Senate earlier this week. The chief of police did note that there's no difference to the day-to-day operations. It is about the regulatory cleanup.

There haven't been jurisdictional issues yet by having the modern treaty. However, we're looking to avoid that, so we're addressing that now.

At the end of the day, residents won't see a difference when we repeal these sections. It's business as usual. However, with the new Northeastern Quebec Agreement, the policing authority is addressed there, so this is redundant now.

• (0855)

Brendan Hanley: We know that this is one aspect contained within Bill C-15, which is currently in committee. We've seen obstructive tactics from the Conservatives. We've been trying to pass some very important justice and public safety legislation. There's a lot more in this budget implementation act. There are investments in clean energy, defence, infrastructure and housing, all of which are as important for indigenous people and first nations as they are for all Canadians, in fact.

Can you talk about the importance of passing the BIA, Bill C-15, as quickly as possible?

Hon. Rebecca Alty: Yes, I definitely encourage all members to pass the BIA as quickly as possible. There's money for infrastructure and for housing, as I responded to MP Lavack. There are a lot of really important projects that, since the budget's been released, communities have been excited about and they want to get the ball rolling on. Really, time is of the essence. We're approaching the summer and construction season, so we do want to be able to get the budget passed as soon as possible.

While you mention other legislation, I would encourage all members... Bill C-10, which is for the commissioner for modern treaties, is up for debate on Monday. I hope the Conservatives will let the debate collapse so that it can be referred to your committee and you can discuss it further. You can hear directly from modern treaty leaders. The Land Claims Agreements Coalition will be here in Ottawa next week. That includes a lot of modern treaty chiefs. I know that they will also be urging committee members and all parties to let debate collapse so that they can come here and have a robust discussion with you.

Thank you.

Brendan Hanley: You actually pre-empted my next question.

To give a little bit of context from a Yukon perspective, Bill C-10 is, of course, the modern treaty commissioner legislation. This is being reintroduced, as we were not able to successfully pass it in the last Parliament.

I can tell you that Yukon first nations chiefs are very anxious that we proceed and get this bill passed. Again, we have seen this obstructed, surprisingly, by Conservative members. I want to reiterate the support for getting Bill C-10 passed.

The Chair: Thank you. That's the time.

Brendan Hanley: We've made our points.

Thank you.

The Chair: We'll go to MP Gill for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for reminding us that it's a matter of making sure everything is aligned. My understanding is that the Conservatives are questioning the work Quebec has done on this issue, as well as what the Naskapi have done. It's something everybody wants. Thank you for clarifying that.

I have a very broad question about your mandate, more specifically about what would concern Quebec. Obviously, some files might concern all jurisdictions, so everyone, but some will concern Quebec in particular. Of course, that's what I'm interested in.

Could you speak to that?

Hon. Rebecca Alty: I think there are small differences between provinces or territories, but it's by working with first nations, Métis and Inuit in each region that we'll know what our partners want. Do they want a self-government agreement, a modern treaty or a sectoral agreement?

I was in Quebec City in January, and I spoke with one of the first nations. We're close to an arrangement on education. That's significant, because when education is provided by first nations, we see better outcomes.

I'm working hard with the department to move this file forward, because it'll be a great success story for Quebec.

• (0900)

Marilène Gill: Thank you very much.

That will be all, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Next, we have five minutes for the Conservatives and MP Schmale.

Jamie Schmale: Thank you very much, Chair.

Again, thank you, Minister.

Going back to the art pieces, we have a collection valued at about \$14.4 million—that's an estimate from your department—and 49,000 dollars' worth of paintings, jewellery and sculptures—you name it—is still missing. During the last heritage committee...it was misplaced, not missing. Obviously, misplaced means it's temporary, but according to Blacklock's Reporter, your department is informing the artists that you're able to identify their misplaced works as missing.

Have we upgraded them now from misplaced to missing? Are we at that stage?

Why has your department blocked access to information requests to find out exactly what pieces are missing and which artists are affected?

Hon. Rebecca Alty: Thank you.

I think it's important, and one of our principles is working with our partners, first and foremost, and making sure that we're in discussions with them before they read about it in the news. That was the important first step that we were taking.

Jamie Schmale: Out of those pieces that are missing or misplaced, how many are missing and how many are misplaced?

Hon. Rebecca Alty: Deputy, do you have those numbers?

Valerie Gideon (Deputy Minister, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs): I do. Out of the 132 unaccounted for items, we have 71 that remain unaccounted for, but 66 of those 71 were acquired by regional offices prior to 1994.

To respond to your question, we have contacted all of the artists, as noted. They have not consented in writing to share the information through the Access to Information Act request. That is why we are unable to provide the information on that front. We do not have their written consent.

Jamie Schmale: In terms of reconciliation, Minister, the Supreme Court mentions two things. One is that the Crown's reconciling for past injustices needs to be done. The second is the burden on governments to reconcile indigenous interests with broader public interests.

Do you believe in that, Minister?

Hon. Rebecca Alty: Yes, and those are the principles that we use. When we negotiate self-government agreements, modern treaties and sectorial agreements—devolving authority when the nations ask, whether that's education or police—it's important that we work with the nations to advance those.

Jamie Schmale: How do we move forward? How do we advance those without infeasible private property?

Hon. Rebecca Alty: We did, at the Cowichan trial, defend the validity of fee simple title and we continue to do that. I think the Haida is an example of where it's working with the nations to come to those agreements outside of the court process.

Jamie Schmale: It's safe to say that the federal government will argue for fee simple property rights.

Hon. Rebecca Alty: That is what we did during the case, and as it's being appealed—it's before the courts—that's the argument we continue to do.

Jamie Schmale: Okay.

With this latest business and trying to get standing in this committee or in the hearing, are you concerned that this will drag the court case on even longer? It's one of Canada's longest court cases in history, if not the longest.

Does the government have any concerns with the fact that until there is some certainty regarding a final decision here, property owners within the city of Richmond are impacted by this? Many can't sell. The province has had to come in to backstop loans and mortgages. Are you concerned that with this latest development this could go on a lot longer and put a lot of people under great stress?

Hon. Rebecca Alty: I think it is important to acknowledge that the uncertainty is stressful, but I think the landowners would also want the federal government and all governments to continue to appeal this, so we are continuing to appeal it. Land ownership and titles do fall within the provincial jurisdiction, which is where the province has stepped up and is backstopping any potential loans that are needed.

• (0905)

Jamie Schmale: Okay.

I'll pass it off to Mr. Morin.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Billy Morin (Edmonton Northwest, CPC): As the Crown-Indigenous Relations minister, do you agree to uphold the Treaty 6 text that says “cede, release, surrender and yield up to the Government of the Dominion of Canada...Her Majesty the Queen and Her successors forever, all...rights, [and] titles and privileges, whatsoever, to the lands” specified within? Yes or no?

[Translation]

Marilène Gill: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The interpreter says the text is being read very quickly and she doesn't have a copy of it. It is therefore very difficult for her to interpret.

[English]

The Chair: The minister will respond in writing, please.

Thank you very much.

For the Liberals, we have MP Earle for five minutes.

Philip Earle (Labrador, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

I think you and I could very easily agree that in this great country of Canada we certainly have the urban, we definitely have the rural and we have the northern. I'm a proud northern MP.

When I use the word “northern”, a couple of other descriptors come to mind, such as fascination, which to me means excitement. I think that for some that northern fascination may be with firearms. I'm not in that category. I believe that another one is “preoccupation”, and preoccupation is focus. I believe that, like me, you are very much focused on the north and on making things different in the north.

When we look at the budget implementation act, we see some of the great things that have been brought forward. You alluded to some of them earlier around housing infrastructure and supports for the north, particularly around special purpose vehicles.

I'm wondering if you could talk to the committee about some of the things that are contained in the budget implementation act. It's been stalled and obstructed. Can you tell us more about some of these things that actually would be really good for the north, the things that northerners are preoccupied with and focused on and less fascinated by?

Hon. Rebecca Alty: Yes, there are a number of things. One would be the Arctic infrastructure fund. It has been many years, and that infrastructure is core. Whether that's for highways, ports, airports or Arctic infrastructure, \$1 billion is really important.

I would also say the Canada Infrastructure Bank...that's an increase from \$35 billion to \$45 billion. I was in Halifax on Friday, talking to people there about the importance of it and how much they're using the Canada Infrastructure Bank to diversify their energy portfolio—like wind.

In the Northwest Territories, where I'm from, M-18 is a natural gas plant. There are shovels in the ground right now to build M-18, and that one is really important. In the beginning of January, for anybody who is following, Inuvik almost ran out of gas, and it was -50°C. To conserve gas at a time like that is pretty difficult. Having M-18 online would have produced that reliable source. M-18 has received its funding through the Canada Infrastructure Bank, so being able to support this budget and to have more investments in the Canada Infrastructure Bank is good.

There are many investments in DND. We're seeing the challenges around the world and potential threats to our sovereignty, so making sure that we get those investments approved as soon as possible for our forces is really important.

As for critical minerals, there are the critical minerals sovereign fund and the first and last mile fund, and those are really important. I met with the CEO of Pine Point right after the budget was released, and he was so excited about the opportunities for critical minerals. Again, it's about those jobs in communities, but also, critical minerals are able to support all this technology that is surrounding us in this room.

There are a lot of things: housing, the urban/rural northern....

I appreciated being in Happy Valley-Goose Bay in November. Also, we're making those investments for Nain, for Rigolet, for many of the communities in Nunatsiavut, to diversify and for communities to displace their diesel content. There are investments in here for those energy needs.

Again, energy infrastructure isn't a “nice to have”; it's life or death in the north. MP Hanley is from Yukon, which, I think, was also really struggling with power outages. I really urge members to pass the budget as soon as possible so that we can get these dollars out to support our communities. That's what our residents voted us here to do.

• (0910)

Philip Earle: Thank you for talking about my riding of Labrador and the investments that our government has made into green energy. Thank you again, Minister, for that focus: Having been there with you, working closely with the Nunatsiavut government, and having that connection with the Innu nation in other projects that we want to do...all to displace the heavy dependence on fuel.

We heard, at this committee this morning, about an electricity bill that was under \$1,000 for a month. Nobody can argue that it's inexpensive, but I know that some of the plans you've been leading and are focused on, in ridings like mine, in Labrador, will go a long way in that regard.

I thank you for your time.

The Chair: That's the time.

Thank you very much, Minister, and all of your staff.

Thank you, Deputy, and your staff.

Thank you to Public Safety as well, for being here.

We have satisfied the first hour of the request from the letter, and the clerk is in the process of contacting the Naskapi and the Cree-Naskapi communities for their opportunity, if they wish, to either appear here or provide something in writing. We will satisfy MP Schmale's resolution by February 27.

We will have a report back, a discussion to the finance committee. Thank you ever so much. This was very helpful for us.

There's one more thing before I let you go; I apologize. I would like the committee's approval to pay for this study, in the amount of \$6,500 at the most.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Then there's the final one. We are going to be landing the land base study. The request is for \$7,000 for that budget.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We are suspended.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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