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Chair: Terry Sheehan



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• (0815)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 32 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 peoples.

Pursuant to the order of the House, the committee is continuing its study of Bill S-2, an act to amend the Indian Act regarding new registration entitlements.

Before we continue, I recommend that all in-person participants begin the meeting with earpieces in and keep them in, because we will switch from French to English questions, and you'll miss some of the questions if you aren't bilingual.

Make sure your mic is off when you're not speaking. It's all about the health of our wonderful interpreters, so please adhere to that, as it really helps them out.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic when it's your turn, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. When you're answering questions, use the “raise hand” function, and the clerk and I will see you.

Thank you very much.

Today we have the Honourable Michèle Audette, senator. Welcome.

As an individual, we have Dalia Edwards by video conference. Hello, Dalia.

We have Nishnawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler with us. It's good to see you again, Grand Chief.

By video conference, we have Chief Derek Epp of the Tzeachten First Nation. Accompanying the chief is Councillor Hayden Guilderson.

You have up to five minutes. I will tell you when you have 30 seconds left so you can wrap up, and then we will cut it at the five minutes.

First up is the honourable senator.

Please take it away.

[Translation]

Hon. Michèle Audette (Senator, Quebec (De Salaberry), PSG): *Tshinashkumitin*, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before your committee.

I will now address the topic at hand.

In the Nicholas decision, the government itself admits that the Indian Act unjustifiably violates section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In other words, it acknowledges that it is discriminatory.

In reality, however, there are two distinct constitutional regimes. The first is a system in which rights are protected, and the second is a system in which rights are extinguished. I can attest to this because we are among those that are sought to be erased. Our rights are under attack. We know what we're talking about, because we've experienced it for a long time. We have been speaking out against this for a long time.

You will also understand, colleagues, that when Bill S-2 came before our chamber, we had a real opportunity to correct several discriminatory provisions in the Indian Act. That is why the amendments proposed by the Senate are essential, particularly those aimed at eliminating exclusion after the second generation, a major source of inequality. I repeat: Canada, the government, has acknowledged that discrimination exists, so it should see this through to the end. It should not take half-measures or do the bare minimum—yet we are currently seeing attempts to do just that.

I would like to add that we see very concrete examples of this in our daily lives. These examples are unacceptable, and we are asked to be patient. Why, as an Innu woman, must I disclose the name of my child's father? If I do not, things become extremely complicated. Yet a Canadian or Quebec woman does not need to provide that information, and her child automatically becomes a Canadian citizen. What's more, recently, this government has widened the gap even further by telling second-generation individuals born outside the country that, if they have one Canadian parent, they are entitled to citizenship, whereas we—first nations women who have been living in these territories for millennia—are denied the one-parent rule. We are denied the ability to pass on our status to our children. If those are not two distinct constitutional systems or regimes, then please explain what they are. For us, the difference is real, and its impact is equally so.

The amendments brought forward by the Senate are not excessive. They are logical. They simply aim to ensure that the legislative response fully respects the right to equality. Most importantly, there are already solutions available. We have even drawn inspiration from different nations and communities that have their own membership rules. In some cases, such as the James Bay Agreement—Minister Gull-Masty is from James Bay—inheriting is based on the one-parent rule. So it works in their case, but not in ours. That's hard to swallow and accept. We wonder why there is such reluctance.

We have shown you, and it has been shown to us, that solutions are available: This is not theoretical, nor is it unrealistic. Of course, to achieve this, nations need support through a parallel process, whether to build their capacity, document their practices, or develop their own approaches to membership. It is important to have a parallel process alongside Bill S-2.

Finally, we must also remember an institutional reality: governments change—people who are here today will eventually move on—but laws remain. They remain for a long time. Their effects shape lives—the lives of many people—across several generations.

The Indian Act is imposed by Parliament. As such, it is our collective responsibility to address the discrimination it embodies. By maintaining these inconsistencies, a message is being sent.

• (0820)

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Hon. Michèle Audette: To conclude, I want to say that we are in 2026. Let's change the Indian Act to make sure I have the same rights as Canadian women.

Thank you.

[Translation]

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

[English]

Next we have Dalia Edwards, by video conference.

You have up to five minutes.

Dalia Edwards (As an Individual): Honourable Chair, members of the House and all my relations,

[Witness spoke in Ojibwa and provided the following text:]

Aanii boozhoo kina wiya. Dalia Edwards miinwa Gimiwan Niimikwe ndishnikaaz. Anishinaabe miinwa shaganash kwe ndaaw. Hamilton ndoonjibaa. Wiikwemkoong ndbendaagoz. Baker Creek British Columbia Lhtako Dene aki megwa ndidaa. Waabizheshi ndoodem.

[Witness provided the following translation:]

Hello, everyone. My name is Dalia Edwards, Gimiwan Niimikwe. I am of Anishinaabe and European descent. I'm originally from Hamilton and belong to Wiikwemkoong unceded territory. I currently live in Baker Creek, British Columbia, Lhtako Dene territory. I am Marten Clan.

[English]

It's an honour to rise today to speak to Bill S-2, not just as policy but as lived reality affecting my family, my children and many others like us.

On paper we speak of equality, rights and fairness, but in reality it's far more complicated and far more painful.

My children are proud to be indigenous. Elders I look up to say this next generation will heal, and I see it in my kids. They come from a proud lineage with deep roots, language, culture and identity, but because of how status and band membership rules intersect with legislation, they may not have the same access to their community as their cousins, just as I did not prior to legislation changes.

This is not because of culture, and it's not because of connection. It's because of colonially imposed policy that conflicts with Canadian laws and the charter, and denies our own pre-existing E'Dbendaagzjig Naaknigewin, our own Anishinabek citizenship laws. These policies continue to divide indigenous families, generation by generation. Cousins whose parents were raised under the same roof will have fundamentally different futures. My family history includes enfranchisement, and its impacts continue across generations.

I struggled in many ways in post-secondary, and ironically, I paid to learn Anishinaabemowin, the language that my *nokomis-baa*, my late grandma, was fluent in but too ashamed to speak. My aunts work with youth who are affected by the second-generation cut-off, and they see how access to physical, mental and academic supports could ease burdens on families.

We cannot speak of reconciliation while UNDA is treated as symbolic and indigenous children are excluded from their own communities through a bureaucratic system that attempts to extinguish us.

I have a three-year-old daughter and an 11-month-old son. When I was preparing to speak to an MP, my daughter asked what I was doing. I told her I was practising what to say to someone who used to be *ogimaa*, a chief. She asked, "Mama, what's a chief?" I told her an *ogimaa* is someone who helps their people and leads in a good way. She asked if she could be one someday, so I told her she would make a great *ogimaakwe*.

The reality is that my strong-willed, kind, spirited daughter may never have that opportunity unless this bill reaches royal assent. It is my hope that she can start school in Anishinaabemowin so we can reclaim our language as a family.

Children deserve to grow up knowing where they belong. They deserve equal access to their culture, community and language, regardless of when their parents were born, their gender or who they love. Are we creating unity or maintaining division? Are we strengthening communities or fragmenting families? We can do better. We must do better.

In closing, *chi-meegwetch* to the many who have fought for indigenous rights and paved the way for this moment, including people such as my distant relative Dr. Jeannette Corbiere Lavell, Keewednanung, who has challenged these discriminatory policies for over 50 years. As she has said, justice delayed is justice denied.

Indigenous people cannot wait another half-century for decisions to be made on our behalf. Let first nations implement the plans already in place. We know who belongs, and welcoming people home to our communities strengthens our communities. Work alongside indigenous people instead of imposing upon us.

In my culture, we speak of looking seven generations ahead, and I ask you to do the same. Be a good ancestor for my children, for all indigenous children and for the future we claim to be building together in reconciliation. Let's choose inclusion, not exclusion, and ensure that no one is left behind.

Chi-meegwetch bizindawiyeg. Thank you all so much for listening. All my relations.

● (0825)

The Chair: *Chi-meegwetch.*

Next we have Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler for up to five minutes.

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler (Nishnawbe Aski Nation): *Meegwetch.*

Good morning. I want to acknowledge everyone in the room. I'm really honoured to be sitting here with my friend Senator Michèle Audette.

Five minutes isn't really a long time to speak to something that is so important to our people. I tried my very best to prepare for this—one minute here, two minutes there and one minute over there. I met with MP Idlout a couple of weeks ago and told her that I was really struggling with this, because what we are trying to do is address something or fix something within our most colonial and racist piece of legislation, which is the Indian Act. We're trying to figure out how we can make it less racist, less harmful or less discriminatory, especially to women—our mothers and sisters—and our children. We just had Red Dress Day.

I trust you, as members of this committee, to figure it out. You're surrounded by probably the top legal brains in the country. You have good technical staff. Why should I come 1,000 miles to Ottawa to tell you how to fix it? You should be able to figure it out yourselves.

Numerous presentations have been made in the past, including by the grand chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Grand Chief Kyra Wilson. I echo the recommendations that have been put forward. Our responsibility is to put an end to the harms that have been created by this piece of legislation, the Indian Act. If we're really serious about addressing the historical wrongs and the injustices against our people, especially women, girls and children, then we need to start looking at actually dismantling the colonial structures that are being held up by things like the Indian Act.

Give the authority back to our people. Ultimately, the solution to this issue about Bill S-2 is to give the authority and jurisdiction back to our communities, for them to be able to determine who

their people are. They're smart enough to figure that out. I think our responsibility, as leaders of this country, is to help in that process. That's why I came here today.

I have a written submission that I can leave with you. It talks more about the technical aspects of what we're talking about here. I just wanted to share with you my own feelings and thoughts. To me, that's the solution: Give that authority, that jurisdiction, back to our nations.

Meegwetch.

● (0830)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your words. Please send your written submission to the clerk. He'll circulate it. The analysts will also look at it and incorporate it.

Thank you. *Chi-meegwetch.*

Next, from Tzeachten First Nation, we have Chief Derek Epp and Hayden Guilderson, in person.

Go ahead, Chief. You have five minutes.

Chief Derek Epp (Tzeachten First Nation): Mr. Chair, we'll be splitting the time. I'll hand it over to Hayden as soon as I'm done.

Good morning, everybody. It's good to see you all again. Thank you for allowing me to come and be a witness at this committee in this important work.

Many of you know who we are and what Ch'íyáqtel does—our progressive economic development and how we've really flipped our script to become economically self-sufficient. A lot of that is our identity and who we are as a nation.

I'm really here to speak in support of the passage of Bill S-2, and I acknowledge the speakers before me in highlighting the importance of why we're here today. It's so important to continue on with this work and look at an opt-in nation-to-nation implementation agreement that includes fiscal planning, capacity support and respect for first nations' jurisdiction.

I'd be happy to dive into the details a bit further on with regard to the fiscal side and our identity as a nation, but I'll hand it over to Councillor Hayden to explain it in more detail.

The Chair: Go ahead, Councillor. You have four minutes and 30 seconds.

Hayden Guilderson (Councillor, Tzeachten First Nation): Thank you, Chief.

Good day, Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Hayden Guilderson, and I serve as a councillor for Ch'iyáqtel, or the Tzeachten First Nation. I am here as a representative of my nation, but also as a father, a community member and someone who has heard directly from our elders, parents and youth about what Indian Act registration means in real life.

I want to begin with a simple point. Ch'iyáqtel is currently facing a risk of legislative extinction, not because our people are disappearing but because of federal law narrowing who counts. We support the passage of Bill S-2 with the Senate amendments intact. We support addressing the second-generation cut-off. Reform is necessary and long overdue, but how that reform is implemented matters.

In 1992, Ch'iyáqtel progressively adopted a custom membership code under section 10 of the Indian Act. Our nation made a clear decision then. If you have a Tzeachten parent, you are Tzeachten. That means you belong to our nation. You are part of our community. You can participate in our ceremonies, hold land, access community supports and be recognized as one of our people, regardless of your status registration. This decision reflects kinship, cultural continuity, responsibility and nationhood.

In other words, Ch'iyáqtel already exercises self-determination by recognizing our own people. The problem is this: We recognize our people, and Canada often does not. Today, Ch'iyáqtel has approximately 750 members. Of those, 612 are registered under the Indian Act. About 190 of those registered members—approximately 31%—are registered under subsection 6(2). This matters because the second-generation cut-off means many of their children may not be eligible for registration if the other parent is not registered.

This is a personal scenario for me. My two children are recognized as Tzeachten members. They belong to our community, but under the current federal registration system, they are not eligible for Indian status because of the second-generation cut-off. That is the disconnect we are asking Parliament to address. The current federal system is creating a separate and shrinking definition of our people. Each generation, more of our members risk being recognized by Ch'iyáqtel but not by Canada.

This is already starting to affect families, housing, programs, services, funding, governance, land use decisions and long-term planning. At its core, this is a threat to Ch'iyáqtel's goal of self-determination. True self-determination requires the authority to define our own citizens. Ch'iyáqtel has already taken steps in that direction. Many first nations have, but federal systems have not kept pace with this.

That is why Bill S-2 matters. Passage alone is not enough. Ch'iyáqtel is recommending an opt-in, nation-to-nation implementation approach. Canada should pass Bill S-2 with the Senate amendments intact and collaborate with first nations on implementation agreements that address three key areas.

The first is the fiscal planning that the chief mentioned. This is essential to ensuring that funding and service arrangements reflect changes in recognition. If Canada is expecting first nations to support more members, the fiscal relationship must evolve accordingly and modernly.

Second, there should be capacity support so first nations are not left to handle administrative and governance pressures alone. This

reform should not mean transferring responsibility without adequate resources in place.

Finally, respect for the jurisdiction of first nations is vital, allowing nations to define their own people based on their laws and customs.

This reform should not be delayed. It needs to be effective and adaptable. An opt-in approach enables nations to proceed at their own pace based on readiness and priorities. Ch'iyáqtel will continue to recognize our people. Canada must align with this reality, ensuring the registry reflects rather than limits our community.

Our message to this committee is clear: Pass Bill S-2 with the Senate amendments intact, address the second-generation cut-off and work with first nations on opt-in, nation-to-nation implementation agreements that include fiscal planning, capacity support and respect for our jurisdiction.

Thank you.

• (0835)

The Chair: Thank you, Councillor.

I'll go right to questions.

MP Morin, you will have six minutes for questions and answers.

Billy Morin (Edmonton Northwest, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to Senator Audette.

A lot of numbers have been done with this bill. I'm sure you guys went over them in the Senate. The implementation of it was 7,000 to 8,000 new people, with maybe an influx of 25,000 at the start. The ISC budget is \$25 billion to \$26 billion, give or take, and the implementation of this was about \$50 million on average per year.

Did you guys go over those numbers, and do you see the numbers as an impediment to getting this done?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Michèle Audette: I'm sorry, I didn't understand the word "impediment". I should have listened to the interpretation.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, Lib.): An impediment is an obstacle.

[English]

Hon. Michèle Audette: When the government or an official brings numbers and funding, it brings a pressure to communities that are affected by the colonial system. Many generations are born under that culture, so they're not aware of or didn't live the former governance of their own nation.

If we play with words on how we bring concerns.... In my world, it's all about how we bring a message and how we speak to people. If we scare people, people will stay scared and will say they don't want it, but if we speak the truth and say, "We imposed that on you, and we will correct that with you", and make sure that, as the councillor and the grand chief mentioned, we build with them—not tell them how—and support them, I believe nobody will be scared.

Billy Morin: You also mentioned in your testimony that the James Bay Cree have a one-parent rule. It has lasted for generations now, and the government recognizes that. Can you confirm that?

Hon. Michèle Audette: I can confirm that. When I met with the minister—because I'm an unusual sponsor for a bill coming from the government—I noted that we've looked for many years at how the Cree do citizenship and membership or how they recognize their people. It should be a good example. If it doesn't work well, they can teach us how to make it better.

Yes, she is aware, as I mentioned, that we had been looking for years at the way they do things with their nation.

Billy Morin: Is the minister from James Bay Cree?

Hon. Michèle Audette: Yes.

Billy Morin: Do they have a one-parent rule there?

Hon. Michèle Audette: Yes.

Billy Morin: Thank you.

Councillor Hayden Guilderson, you had an excellent example of how section 10 is a good step forward, but it's not the complete step forward for self-determination and recognition of your people. You said, along with Chief Epp, that your nation is doing well, at least in terms of economics, and that's based in identity.

You guys have your own one-parent rule, but it's not recognized, and that's hindering the future of your nation. Even for you, there's a fear that the nation could go extinct. Is that what you said?

Hayden Guilderson: Definitely. There's a concern with the one-parent rule in our custom section 10 membership code. We have a one-parent rule. If a kid has a Tzeachten parent, they are entitled to Tzeachten membership. That enables certain benefits, but it doesn't qualify them for status registration.

The projection that we as a council and our governance model are looking at says that if the projection and legislation don't change, we are on a long-term track, statistically, for extinction. Year over year, as we take on more non-status members, that will impact a lot of governance decisions—land-use planning, housing targets and those types of things. That stresses the need for reform.

● (0840)

Billy Morin: The government always says "nation to nation". They use that a lot, but I don't think they go to the United States, France or any nation they have a relationship with and tell a presi-

dent or a member of a legislative body that we don't recognize their child, so they're not going to be a country going forward.

If they're saying "nation to nation", are they living up to it in this regard?

Hayden Guilderson: I'm not sure of the exact details of your question in that manner, but there's the key aspect that all of our community members need to be recognized and need to be included in our communities. As I mentioned, Tzeachten has already taken steps to do that, but not having the Canada status, the recognition of that, is an impact and a barrier.

Quite frankly, it's causing a bit of divisiveness in our community, because as a council, we do our best to create equal classification of all members, but at the end of the day, there's always going to be a disconnect between status members and non-status members. That's a difficult thing to deal with.

Billy Morin: Absolutely.

Grand Chief Fiddler, the government's latest documents, when they started the second-generation cut-off in this latest round of consultations in 2023, indicated they want to go to 2027. Do you think they're using consultation as a shield to delay this?

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: I'm sorry, but I couldn't hear that. You mentioned the consultation timeline.

Billy Morin: Do you think they're using consultation as a shield? I ask because their latest thing is that they started these consultations in 2023, and they want to go to 2027. Are they using consultation as a delay tactic?

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: I would like to know who they're consulting, first of all.

The Chair: That's all the time we have. Perhaps this will come out through more questions, and you'll be able to answer.

Your time is done, MP Morin.

Welcome to Steven Guilbeault, who is subbing in today.

Next up for questioning is Lori for six minutes.

Lori Idlout (Nunavut, Lib.): *Qujannamiik, Iksivautaq.*

Thank you to the witnesses for their testimony. It's important that you share all your experiences with us.

My first question is for Alvin.

You gave more of a personal testimony today, and you said that you'd submit your written testimony. In your personal testimony, do you think that you reflected the views of your nation, or was that more of a personal story that you wanted to share?

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: We have been meeting with our own leadership on this very important issue. We just had our spring assembly in March, where the 49 chiefs of NAN gathered, along with our elders council, youth council and women's council. This is what they talk about. This is important to them.

Lori Idlout: Thank you so much.

My next questions are for Senator Audette.

Thank you for sharing as well.

It really hadn't connected for me that Minister Gull-Masty was aware of the one-parent rule. Do you think that because of where she's from, she's an expert on that kind of approach when it comes to self-determination?

Hon. Michèle Audette: I would say she does. I cannot speak for her, but my understanding, with respect, is that she understands, and she mentioned there are some realities that could be improved. That tells me that in any society, we have the duty to improve every day as human beings or as a collective.

As a former president of Quebec Native Women—and I was not talking on behalf of all women, but members of the organization—I know it was clear that the James Bay agreement with the Inuit, the Naskapi and the Cree, with the way they recognize their people and the one-parent rule, was for us a big hope that one day this would also be implemented for first nation women.

● (0845)

Lori Idlout: When she suggests, for example, that she is concerned about the one-parent rule being a one-size-fits-all approach, should we not be listening to her?

Hon. Michèle Audette: I would say this is where I have a personal problem. Right now, the Indian Act is a one-size-fits-all approach, if I may use your example, but if a nation has a modern treaty, it has an opportunity to change.

It's sometimes okay to change the Indian Act for a specific region or community. Also, a chief cannot speak on behalf of all members, just as you have the opposition. Canada has the choice to decide who will be its spokesperson. It's the same for the chief. They do their best with not that much support. If many of us, and also chiefs now, are saying that 40 years ago we weren't ready and 20 years ago we weren't ready, but in 2025 we are ready to make those changes, I think it's time to change them.

Lori Idlout: Thank you so much.

Having also heard from the Tzeachten First Nation—which has had its issues with the one-parent rule—does it not seem clear that at least some more consultation is needed so that we can avoid scenarios where there's continued discrimination? I understand that we all have the same intent with regard to the Indian Act—that discrimination must end. I think we all agree that the version sent to the Senate did not meet that intent and that you went beyond the scope asked of you, to add amendments for the second-generation rule.

I would like you to share with us on that. Would you agree that the minister has the obligation or duty to consult and thus to make sure there's some more consultation so that even if the second-gen-

eration cut-off were added as an amendment, some work is still done to ensure that discrimination truly does end?

Hayden Guilderson: Consultation is important.

I can only speak for my community and my membership and say that Ch'iyáqtel is at a point where no more consultation is needed. We are ready to move this forward. We are in a position where I've spoken with our elders, our community and our youth, who, to be quite frank, are sick of not being recognized by Canada anymore. I can't speak for other communities across Canada, and I don't know if the chief has anything else to add on that point with regard to consultation. I'll leave it there.

The Chair: We just ran out of time. There will be no more questions and answers.

[Translation]

Mrs. Gill now has the floor.

Mrs. Gill, you have six minutes.

Marilène Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank all the chiefs, the senator and the witnesses who joined us today.

As you know, we have been discussing this for several meetings now. I always get the impression—and I don't mean to oversimplify—that we have reached the voting stage. In fact, I see that we're talking about details and consultations. Those consultations have taken place, but what we're really talking about is discrimination—specifically against women; we're talking about rights; we're talking about genocide. We're asking ourselves whether we should hold consultations to determine if, with regard to genocide, we're doing everything we can to combat it.

When it comes to discrimination against women, we're asking whether we shouldn't wait a bit before ending the discrimination. That greatly surprises me. We're even using the word “consultation”—and it seems to me that we're twisting it against indigenous peoples by saying they want to be consulted, but that when we do consult them, they no longer want to be. That fascinates me.

I believe we are at a different point now and that, for Bill S-2, we should proceed diligently. I think we already know the parties' positions. I would like to hear more from Chief Fiddler, Chief Epp, Mr. Guilderson and Senator Audette, as well as Ms. Edwards.

In my view—correct me if I'm wrong—we do, however, agree that the situation is discriminatory, genocidal, and that some First Nations are being extinguished. That is the case even in my riding of Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan. In Kawawachikamach, we know that the Naskapi have the one-parent rule. However, for the Innu—and I'm also thinking of Uashat-Maliotenam—it's similar to what is happening with the Tzeachten first nation. It's about the same situation. We can see that this is heading towards extinction.

To me, by the end of the parliamentary session, the government should treat this as an emergency. In any case, the court has asked it to act with diligence. Are we ready to vote?

Senator Audette, you were present during the Senate proceedings, and you participated assiduously and with great dedication. We heard Senator McCallum say that the Prime Minister and Minister Gull-Masty did not want any amendments, that we should not even consider them because they would not pass the bill with amendments. I find that outrageous. As representatives—and I think that is what “consulting” means—you are telling us that you are ready.

Should we then pass the bill diligently and quickly, with the Senate’s amendments—which is indeed what we have before us—without further discussion of the issue of rights, the issue of discrimination, or the issue of genocide—which, in my view, should be resolved by legislators?

In short, we still find ourselves in a system governed by the Indian Act, which is colonial and paternalistic.

Thank you all very much. Please allot the remaining speaking time as you see fit.

● (0850)

[English]

The Chair: There are three minutes to share. I'll keep track for you.

Hon. Michèle Audette: I can start if you want.

[Translation]

With regard to the duty to consult, I encourage all parliamentarians—senators and MPs alike—to recognize that if we are to invoke it, we must do so in the case of Bill C-5 and all bills that pass through both chambers. Let's be honest.

Furthermore, this is a matter of discrimination. That is our duty: to ensure we uphold not only the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but also what first nations have been asking for since they were officially heard in the Senate within the parliamentary context. Next, the process of dialogue and exchange with first nations should be a parallel process that should continue to support my fellow chiefs who are here.

We therefore need two very distinct things to have a constitutional framework.

[English]

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: Very quickly to your point about consultation and to the previous question by MP Morin, consultation can be a good thing and it can work. The problem is that Canada hasn't always been consistent when it comes to talking to first nations people. For example, a year ago, Canada rammed through a piece of legislation, Bill C-5, on major projects. We weren't even in the same room when the bill was being drafted. In fact, I remember coming to Ottawa last year and having to sit in the hallway while parliamentarians were debating and crafting this piece of legislation, which would have a direct impact on the lives of our people. Where was the consultation then?

The Chair: We have one minute.

Go ahead, Chief Epp.

Chief Derek Epp: I'd like to acknowledge the speakers before me, who really highlighted some important topics and points. Thank you for allowing me to explain a bit further as well.

It's important to acknowledge that the language presented by Hayden is an opt-in, nation-to-nation opportunity to implement these agreements. Yes, consultation is important. We cannot negate consultation. However, we have a solution in front of us that I think works.

I want to tell a quick story. This is the reason I am not there today.

I was at a ceremony last night in my community for our children aged zero to five to welcome them to our community. We blanketed each of our children, provided them with headbands and brought them back to our community in a very cultural way, which, quite frankly, we fund. Because we're economically self-sufficient, we decide who the children of our community are.

To what the previous speakers have shared with us, there is a fundamental disconnect between that and what the Indian Act currently says. It is discriminatory. It does have language that separates.

Thank you. I just wanted to share that.

The Chair: Thank you for that story.

MP Schmale, go ahead.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for this very important discussion.

Senator, I'll start with you. I have a very quick question that's a point of clarification.

Based on your testimony a few minutes ago to my colleague Mr. Morin, you said that you met with Minister Gull-Masty on this topic. In our last meeting, we had Senator McCallum in front of us. Senator McPhedran was right behind her. Senator McCallum said on record that in conversation with Minister Gull-Masty, the Prime Minister did not want these amendments to go through. Senator McPhedran backed her up on that in that conversation.

Is that something that was relayed to you as well?

● (0855)

Hon. Michèle Audette: With respect to that exchange, I wouldn't be surprised. I wasn't there, so I cannot say yes or no.

It was clear that the first discussion was open, but soon after, quickly, in another debate, Minister Gull-Masty was honest with me that she, or the government, didn't want any amendments. I mentioned that I could step down as a sponsor if she wanted, because for Bill C-38 and Bill S-2, I cannot say no to an important amendment like the one we have in front of us.

Jamie Schmale: Thank you very much, Senator.

Grand Chief Fiddler, you've been here so many times—and not just at this committee, but at many others. I think we'll have to name a room after you or something like that.

My colleague Eric Melillo has some questions for you.

The Chair: You have three minutes, Eric.

Eric Melillo (Kenora—Kiiwetinoong, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Schmale, for being so kind as to share some time with me.

It's good to see you again, Grand Chief. I appreciate your comments.

I was going to ask you about the consultation process, but some other members beat me to that. Maybe we can circle back if you have more to say on it, but I think you really hit the nail on the head in saying in your opening remarks that we're trying to make the most discriminatory, racist piece of legislation less racist.

I'm curious to hear you expand further on how Bill S-2 fits into the broader discussion of moving away from the act itself or taking down colonial structures to allow for more empowerment and more self-determination of first nations. Could you speak to how you see Bill S-2 fitting into that broader process?

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: That's the broader conversation we should all be having. Rather than focusing on certain aspects of the Indian Act, we should have a broader conversation about how we begin to move beyond the Indian Act.

As a first nations person, I'm governed by the Indian Act from the time I'm born to the time I die—to even which coffin I'll be buried in. To me, that's wrong. At some point we need to talk about.... I think about my own kids, and hopefully later on my own grandkids. I don't want them to be subject to that.

As we talk about this and certain aspects of the Indian Act, we should all be engaged in a broader conversation about how we begin to move beyond that. We've started that conversation at NAN, and I think we need to have the conversation in a much broader environment, even in committee rooms like this, to figure that out.

Eric Melillo: I appreciate that.

I also appreciated your earlier comments around the fact that we should be able to get these things done. It shouldn't take this long. I've been elected, now, for almost seven years, and have been on this committee for most of that time. We've done a lot of good work here, across party lines. We brought forward a number of reports that the analysts worked very hard to make coherent. They sit on a minister's desk and don't get moved forward. I just want to echo the frustration you shared.

I don't have a lot of time.

Could you speak, in the time I have left, to some of the personal aspects of Bill S-2—things you're hearing around the second-generation cut-off in NAN territory and in northwestern Ontario?

The Chair: You have 17 seconds. It's not a lot of time.

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: Earlier, I mentioned Red Dress Day and how important it is to commemorate missing and murdered indigenous women and girls in order to ensure that the MMI-

WG commission's calls to action are fully implemented. This is part of that. Our sisters and moms have been harmed so greatly by the state—by the colonial pieces of legislation that proceed to have an impact on our lives.

We need to start somewhere. If you can figure out how to do this with Bill S-2, that, to me, would be a really good start.

• (0900)

The Chair: Thank you, Chief.

Next we have Ms. Lavack for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ginette Lavack (St. Boniface—St. Vital, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses who've joined us today. Their time and their testimony are truly important.

From its inception, Bill S-2 had a very specific purpose and timeline. It aimed to resolve the whole issue of emancipation affecting over 3,000 first nations people. However, the desired timeline for this bill may not be met because amendments were made to aspects that the government had committed to resolving. From the moment we took office last spring, we committed to addressing the second-generation issue.

In 2023, we began a collaborative process to jointly develop this legislation with first nations. I emphasize the word “collaborative” because we are not just talking about consultation. That means that together, we wanted to address and resolve this issue. We wanted to create a bill that would be as robust as possible, with the approval and input of first nations.

For me, it's important to note that the government had a specific goal, which is why it did not want amendments to the bill. On the one hand, we had a goal to achieve and a timeline we were trying to meet. On the other hand, we wanted to develop this new bill that would address the issue.

My question is for you, Chief Fiddler, and concerns the collaborative process. Did your nation participate in the government's collaborative process seeking first nations' input to find ways to address the issue of exclusion after the second generation?

[English]

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: We've been having these conversations for some time now. As I said, we had our spring assembly with the 49 chiefs of NAN in Toronto in March, where we gathered with our advisory councils, including the women's council, the youth council and the elders council. This is what they talked about—how these policies continue to harm many of our families.

That's where our direction comes from, and as I'm the grand chief of NAN, that's where my mandate comes from. I come to committee rooms like this and speak directly to those who have the authority to make these changes.

[Translation]

Ginette Lavack: Can you tell us about your experience with this collaboration so far, what it means for your nation, and what you hope for moving forward?

[English]

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: As I said earlier, it's been a mixed experience. It depends on the piece of legislation we're dealing with at the time. Sometimes we are totally excluded from the room. For example, I mentioned what happened last spring with the creation and passage of Bill C-5. We were not even allowed to be in the room when the committee was inside deliberating.

[Translation]

Ginette Lavack: This time, you were invited to collaborate. You participated in the collaborative process. If you were consulted, collaborated on the process and discussed it, I would like to know more.

[English]

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: That's why I'm here. I was invited, and I made sure to be here to speak with you directly.

[Translation]

Ginette Lavack: I have a quick question for Mr. Guilderson.

You mentioned the possibility of another provision. Do the amendments go far enough? We're talking about an opt-in amendment. Shouldn't we first complete this collaborative process, which should happen in the coming weeks or months?

Shouldn't this be an opportunity to use the information gathered during collaborative sessions and the subsequent analysis to take the amendments further, and possibly include things like the opt-in opportunity?

• (0905)

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Councillor, but we're out of time. You can send that in writing to us. We'll take into consideration the clause that you think is missing.

Hayden Guilderson: Yes, that sounds good. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we will go to Ms. Gill.

[Translation]

You have two and a half minutes.

Marilène Gill: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

As my colleague said earlier, we need to act quickly. I spoke about urgency. I hope the committee will decide to move forward and conclude its study of the bill before the summer recess.

I'll give Chief Epp or the other witnesses a chance to say a final word.

In my view, we already have the answer. For example, my party supports the bill as amended. I think we're ready to get to work and proceed to a vote.

First nations agree, and they are the ones most directly affected. As a non-indigenous legislator, I feel uncomfortable deciding the identity and future of other nations.

I would like to know if you are ready to move forward. Yes, the bill can always be further improved, but I believe that first nations are watching the decades pass and their extinction draw near. Can we move forward right now? If there is anything else to be done, we'll do it afterwards.

Hon. Michèle Audette: Colleague, I'd like to take 30 seconds to make a point.

Not only does Bill S-2 address the Nicholas decision, it also deals with natal band membership, deregistration, and offensive terms. Other issues have been added. It also allows us to bring in all the other issues stemming from the Indian Act.

We're talking about collaboration with first nations. Spending \$20,000 on such an important exercise shows, in my view, a lack of respect when it comes to collaboration. Let us be sincere.

Thank you, and I hope you will vote in favour of Bill S-2 as amended.

[English]

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: Thank you for that.

We've been doing our own work with our own communities with our own consultation process. I think it's been made very clear by our people that this needs to be addressed and that we need to abolish the cut-off. The sooner we can move on this, the better, so we can give that assurance to our families.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That concludes this panel. We will suspend to give you enough time to vacate before the next one comes in. The senator knows exactly what I'm talking about.

Thank you very much to all of you for your words today.

• (0905)

(Pause)

• (0915)

The Chair: Welcome, everyone, to the second panel.

Appearing as an individual, we have Cynthia Lapierre.

From the Anishinabek Nation, we have Marsha Smoke, southeast regional chief. Hello.

Grand Chief Linda Debassige was not able to be here due to an understandable circumstance. We wish her all the best.

From the Assembly of First Nations, we have National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak with us by video conference, and in the room with us are William David, in-house senior legal counsel, and Julie McGregor, chief of staff. Thank you very much.

From the citizens' group Les enfants d'Aataentsic, we have Mario Huneault, civil engineer.

To kick it off, make sure you have your earpieces in, because people are going to switch between questions in English and French, and make sure you're on the channel of your choice and that you have the volume up.

Let us begin with Cynthia.

Cynthia Lapierre (As an Individual): [*Witness spoke in Wendat and provided the following text:*]

Ndio aweti'. Cynthia Lapierre yiatsih. Ohskēnonton' iwayitiohk-ou'tenh. Wendat chia' Franco-Ontarienne endi'.

[*Witness provided the following translation:*]

Hello, everyone. My name is Cynthia Lapierre. I am Deer Clan. I am Wendat and Franco-Ontarian.

[*English*]

I am the descendant of Hermine Bastien Lainé, who was born and raised in Wendake and was a resident of her community until her wedding day. She was among the first nations women who were stripped of their Indian rights and forcibly removed from their communities to assimilate to the settler colonial state from 1869 to 1985 for marrying a non-indigenous man.

My granddaddy, James Tweddell, was proud to remind his children and grandchildren of our Wendat heritage. Though I did not know or understand at the time, he was trying to transmit what little he could, what little he knew, because he was never recognized. He lovingly and proudly transmitted what he could. He planted a seed.

I am the first since my great-grandmother to return to Wendake and to have my Indian status. I continued my granddaddy's legacy of re-establishing our connection, and I succeeded. Today, with more and more confidence, I affirm my Wendat identity.

I am a part of my community. I work in Wendat language revitalization. I am a longhouse woman. I am a smoke dancer at powwow. I am healing and celebrating the connection that was lost for three generations. Studies have found that trauma is intergenerational, and I'm here to tell you that healing is also intergenerational.

A few weeks ago, Troy Chalifoux said, "you have not heard anything new." His statement propelled me to want to share my story, a story that has not been heard as much, a story of the Descheneaux case, descendants of women who lost their status and the ones buried for generations who are now regaining their rights. The Indi-

an Act tried to bury us, but it didn't know that we were seeds. We regained our rights as Canada repaired sex-based discrimination in the Indian Act, but we're not here to talk about Bill C-31, the McIvor case or the Descheneaux case.

Why is my story relevant to Bill S-2? It's because history is repeating itself. There are children in our communities who are ghosts. They have no rights or recognition or belonging. When these children turn 18, they will be forced to leave their communities, like my great-grandmother, who was forced to leave when she married.

These children, like my granddaddy, are socially and culturally excluded and forced to live out their lives as Canadians. You assimilate from birth and deny all potential for cultural transmission to future generations, thus committing genocide in real time. The McIvor and Descheneaux cases brought corrections to sex-based discriminations, yet Canada continues to uphold its discriminatory policies, such as with subsections 6(1) and 6(2) of the Indian Act.

Let's not forget when and why these were created. With Bill C-31 in 1985, some women and their children regained their rights. The Indian Act had to adapt to uphold its objective of genocide and give women and children their status while introducing a second-generation cut-off. It's working.

As of today, registered Wendat aged zero to 39, those having or who will have children, are 87% subsection 6(2). They can't pass on status. If Bill S-2 is not passed, their descendants will suffer as the last three generations of my family have suffered. They will be buried, but I can guarantee you this: They are also seeds.

As long as Canadians continue to live on Turtle Island and benefit from its renewable resources, so too is your accountability to the treaties between us, and so too is your accountability to not only address but repair the harm the Indian Act has caused and continues to cause. Ending the second-generation cut-off will break the ongoing cycle of genocide in the Indian Act.

You have heard it all—the legal, political, ethical and human reasons to move forward with this bill. I call on you to do the right thing. Today, at this very moment, it is you, the members of Parliament, who have the power to right the greatest of wrongs in the Indian Act and to pass Bill S-2 with amendments made by the Senate to ensure the survival of our nations and all faces yet to come.

The headline that I'd like to see this year is, "In 2026, the Indian Act turns 150 years old. Canada, in a true act of reconciliation, abolishes its original objective of the genocide of first nations by implementing a one-parent rule that guarantees their survival for all time".

Someday, it is your descendants who will look back on this day in Canadian history with pride knowing that you finally did the right thing.

Io.

● (0920)

The Chair: *Meegwetch.*

Next up we have Marsha Smoke, southeast regional chief.

You have up to five minutes, Marsha. If you weren't here at the beginning, when you get to about 30 seconds left, I'll say "30 seconds" so you can wrap it up. Then there's going to be lots of time for dialogue with the MPs.

Go ahead.

Chief Marsha Smoke (Southeast Regional Chief, Anishinabek Nation): *Meegwetch.*

[*Witness spoke in Anishinaabemowin and provided the following translation:*]

Hello. My name is Marsha Smoke, Anishinaabe-Kwe and Bear Clan from the Alderville First Nation.

[*English*]

Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, I want to begin by acknowledging my ancestors, who are here with me today. I also want to reflect upon the long history of colonial policies that sought to dispossess and assimilate first nations from our lands, our resources, our cultures and our identities. In fact, for 186 consecutive years and 361 days, your lineage of predecessors has been legislating our people, our lands and our resources under the guise of protecting us, from the earliest days of Upper Canada, in through Confederation and still to this day.

In January, Prime Minister Carney made a very significant speech in Davos, and very much described our relationship with settler hegemony with this country. We are still living with the impacts of those colonial policies—the structural disposition, cultural assimilation, erasure and incorporation. That is why I'm here before you today.

From the earliest days of colonial Canada, a shift from the royal proclamation, the Treaty of Niagara and the military alliance during the 18th and 19th centuries occurred. Active assimilation and state control over lands, resources and identity started. These hegemonic actions laid the foundation of the Indian Act in 1876, a piece of legislation legitimizing hegemony. The Indian Act itself was designed to control and assimilate our nations. Enfranchisement laws stripped our people of status and disconnected families from their lands and their nations.

These are historical facts. The legacy of these policies remains at the forefront today, manifested through systemic discrimination, broken treaties, broken promises, broken families and ongoing marginalization. Those discriminatory impacts continue to remain embedded within the Indian Act itself. That is why Bill S-2 matters.

The Anishinabek Nation supports the immediate passage of Bill S-2, including the Senate amendments and the one-parent rule to eliminate the second-generation cut-off. The second-generation cut-off continues to discriminate against first nation families by limiting the ability to pass on legal status across generations. Over time, it removed our people from our nations through federal law.

Some have described this as legislative extinction. We are the only people in this country subjected to legislation designed to exterminate our legal status over generations. The federal government has acknowledged this discrimination, but acknowledgement without action is not justice. Consultation and implementation discussions are important, but they cannot be used to delay equality or postpone the correction of known discrimination.

In short, there ought to be no weaponization of the duty to consult. Instead, perhaps governments should look within and ask themselves this: How do we atone for these injustices after almost two centuries? How do we ensure that first nations have an appropriate amount of land and resources to welcome their citizens back and to teach them about their language, culture and traditions?

Canada must stop treating our nations as a financial burden or exercise, because that is what this delay is really about—the cost of doing the right thing. There is a clear distinction that must be recognized. Canada is responsible for fixing discriminatory federal legislation. First nations are responsible for determining how implementation occurs within their own nations. We can work on implementation together, but equality cannot wait.

The Anishinabek Nation is already doing this work through E'Dbendaagzjig, our citizenship laws. Our chiefs and communities are advancing citizenship discussions grounded in our own laws, teachings and principles of belonging. We are not absent from this process. We are at the table. We are helping shape the path forward.

We have heard exaggerated projections suggesting hundreds of thousands of people could immediately become entitled to registration. Historical experience does not support those claims.

We must recognize that enfranchisement was not only about identity. It also resulted in the loss of first nations lands. Restoring rights must therefore include discussions around land, housing, infrastructure and additions to reserve reforms so that our nations can grow and support future generations.

The Senate amendments provide a clear and practical solution. The work has been done. The courts have spoken. First nations have consistently pushed for these changes. From an Anishinabek Nation perspective, we are guided by a simple teaching: We do not leave anyone behind.

Parliament is not being asked to develop a solution. The solution is already before you with the Senate amendments.

● (0925)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Marsha Smoke: Pass the bill, adopt the amendments and finish the work.

Meegwetch.

The Chair: *Chi-meegwetch.*

Next we have National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak.

National Chief Cindy Woodhouse-Nepinak (Assembly of First Nations): Terry, it's nice to see you.

[*Witness spoke in Ojibwa and provided the following translation:*]

Hello. I'm very honoured to be with you and glad you are all able to attend this event today.

[*English*]

I'm here with Chief Norman from Wagmatcook First Nation and many other chiefs here on the east coast. I asked him to sit with me today because this is affecting his nation and his territory.

Chi-meegwetch for being here.

My name is Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak. I'm the national chief. I would like to acknowledge that I'm enjoying you today from beautiful Mi'kmaq territory here in Nova Scotia. There are many chiefs from this region in the room with me, as they would all be affected by this bill.

I want to thank the committee for the invitation to appear today as it studies Bill S-2.

The Assembly of First Nations has reviewed the advisory process final recommendations and feedback report. We gathered and considered input from first nations communities and carefully examined the potential impacts of different approaches to the second-generation cut-off rule. During our December special chiefs assembly, leadership engaged in considerable dialogue on this topic and adopted AFN resolution number 54/2025. Among other things, this policy reaffirms first nations' rights to identify our citizens. It informs my remarks today.

It is widely accepted that the objective of the Indian Act's second-generation cut-off rule is to reduce Canada's obligation by steadily decreasing the number of people entitled to Indian status. It reduces us on paper even as our people continue to exist.

The second-generation cut-off rule has serious implications for first nations identity and membership. It is discriminatory and increasingly restrictive over generations. It is a blood quantum rule rooted in colonial thinking.

Status depends on how much Indian ancestry Canada believes we have. The rule treats first nations identity as something that can be diluted and eventually erased. It does not reflect first nations' understandings of belonging. It places the power to decide who is "Indian enough" with the federal government.

Over time, this has caused real harm. It teaches families to measure themselves and each other using Canada's rules. It has created divisions and intergenerational harm within communities, while also reducing access to services. It has caused many of our people to question their own legitimacy, identity and culture.

To those listening, I personally know this is difficult, but we lift you up in a good way. We want you to know it is you we are fighting for here today.

The second-generation cut-off rule raises serious human rights concerns. The United Nations declaration affirms first nations'

rights to determine our own identity and membership, to maintain our cultural, institutional and kinship systems, and to be free from forced assimilation. Canada has endorsed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and passed legislation committing to its implementation, yet the second-generation cut-off rule remains. Canada still decides who we are and are not.

The United Nations declaration requires free, prior and informed consent, which requires first nations to be meaningfully involved in decisions that affect our rights, identities and futures. Changes to the second-generation cut-off rule directly affect identity, citizenship, community membership and future generations. Free, prior and informed consent is essential, not optional. Addressing the second-generation cut-off rule is therefore not only a policy issue but also a human rights obligation.

The harshest impacts of the status quo fall, of course, on our women, our descendants as women and those already made vulnerable by colonial practices and policies. Despite previous amendments to the Indian Act, the second-generation cut-off rule continues to perpetuate sex- and gender-based discrimination. The result is an erosion of first nations identity, sovereignty and self-determination, as well as a systemic reduction of our status population. This truth has legal and governance consequences for our people, and it impacts funding, land entitlement and political participation.

That is why we are calling for a co-developed national implementation framework once Bill S-2 passes as amended. To be effective, this framework should be led by rights holders in order to determine how best to implement first nations jurisdiction over membership and citizenship.

In addition to timelines, dispute resolution mechanisms and accountability measures, the framework must include the elephant in the room—funding—because there is no getting around the fact that Canada must do the right thing and commit to targeted and ongoing investment. Stable funding to meet new demands for housing, health, education, social services, infrastructure and other essential supports must be part of the discussion.

● (0930)

The truth is that political will and leadership are required to honour the Crown. While the path forward seems complex, it will be much clearer if government leaders stick to the principled path of co-development and free, prior and informed consent.

Chi-meegwetch.

The Chair: *Chi-meegwetch*, National Chief. It's good to see you as well.

Next we have Mario Huneault.

You have up to five minutes, Mario.

[*Translation*]

Mario Huneault (Civil Engineering, Regroupement citoyen : Les enfants d'Aataentsic): [*Witness spoke in indigenous language*]

[*Translation*]

My name is Mario Huneault. I'm from the wolf clan. I'm Wendat. I wish I didn't have to stand before you today, but the honour of my ancestors has guided me here to you. The duty to speak for those who live in silence and in the shadows has given me the courage to come and share our stories with you—the stories of those who resist, of those who refuse to die. I thank you for this opportunity.

Today, I represent the Wendat group Les Enfants d'Aataentsic, which brings together hundreds of Wendat parents and grandparents affected by exclusion after the second generation—the very people whose future you will decide within these walls.

We laid ourselves bare in the Senate last fall through the courageous actions of my sister Mélanie Savard, and now our ordeal of suffering leads us once again to defend our dignity before you.

I also stand here today in my own name, as a humble Wendat hunter-gatherer. What I am as a Wendat, I owe solely to my weary hands, the sweat I have poured, and to my ancestors. Despite my short stature, I have built a resilient and thriving Wendat family outside the community, with two beautiful children.

However, the story of my lineage now ends here. My grandchildren, present or future, will never be able to live from our territory—the Onyionhwentsiio—as I have, or join me there for our community activities. Lacking status, they will be denied access.

How am I supposed to explain to them that they deserve less than I do to live on this territory, which is at the very heart of our Wendat identity? My heart, my emotions, everything I have built to protect myself is falling apart.

It's urgent that we take action: Our children are currently erased and not even registered; they don't exist. They are “ghosts” within our community. Although they are alive, they suffer in silence while you study their future and conduct further consultations.

Currently, dozens of parents in our group are enduring injustices and humiliation within their own families.

How do you tell your child that they can't attend elementary school because they don't live at the right address? That they live in Wendake, but can't receive medical care there like the others?

How do you explain to your daughter that she can't play in the community hockey tournament with her friends, even though she practises with them every week?

How do you explain to them that they will likely never have access to many community activities? How do you also explain to

them that their future as Wendat will be decided without them, without their being able to share their lived experiences and bear witness to a sense of belonging for which they are already shedding tears?

Parents and grandparents, for their part, feel helpless and suffer just as much from a loss of meaning. No one is listening to them, because why pay attention to their children who have been assimilated and “whitened” by your system? They aren't even worthy of inheriting our family heritage. Our children, along with their parents and grandparents, are experiencing a tragic loss of identity and belonging; they're vulnerable and deeply wounded, yet they're still being told that consultations are needed. Enough is enough!

Members of Parliament, you've gone around in circles long enough. We've been humiliated enough. We ask you today to pass Bill S-2 and the amendments proposed by the Senate to put an end to our families' suffering. I myself have sacrificed enough. A setback will send the signal that the government condones the programmed extinction of our people within about 70 years. The Indian Act will then have triumphed.

Do not make the mistake of conflating Indian status with belonging in order to justify your desire for even more consultations.

Isn't it time to give reconciliation and reparations a real chance through Canada's commitment to putting an end to our programmed extinction? Let us rebuild our community.

Io.

● (0935)

[*English*]

The Chair: *Chi-meegwetch.*

Now we're going to questions.

First off, we have MP Morin for six minutes.

Billy Morin: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all of our guests for coming today.

National Chief, it's déjà vu, because you were speaking on this topic two months ago exactly. Thank you for coming again.

I'm going to ask you a question. Why do you think it is that the Prime Minister said we're going to move “at speeds not seen in generations” on things like Bill C-5, but they want to keep consulting on things like sex discrimination in the Indian Act over years? Why do you think there's a double standard coming from this government at this time?

Cindy Woodhouse-Nepinak: Thank you for the question. It's nice to see you again, Chief. You're always chief to me, no matter what. We hold you up in high regard.

I know that it's a new government. We want to give them the benefit of the doubt that they'll do the right thing. I also want to remind Parliament that you can't deal with other groups and give them full ways to deal with themselves, yet leave some of these issues on the shelf and not deal with them in an expedited way.

I call on all parliamentarians to come to the table. Let's work this out. Let's work some of the issues out and get to a good place where we're not talking about this for the next 20 years. Those are my thoughts on that. If you want to change the country, well, one of the most important things we should be working on first and foremost is protecting first nations families from the erosion of our rights.

I have Marsha in the room. If she wants to, she can add something further to that. Regional Chief Marsha is so well versed on this that we lift her up in a good way.

Those are my thoughts today.

Billy Morin: Thank you for that, National Chief.

I'm going to build on something you said about the current government and what they're pushing. We heard today that the James Bay Cree, where the minister is from, has a one-parent rule. We've heard that other nations that have modern treaties have a one-parent rule.

The government is currently pushing the Manitoba Métis Federation bill-treaty through, and it is my understanding that they have a one-parent rule, but the government is delaying this. Again, what does it say about the government when they want to delay this but allow others to go through?

• (0940)

Cindy Woodhouse-Nepinak: Right now, first nations and the Crown are at a crossroads in their relationship. In their relationship with first nations, and even ourselves as first nations.... I want to have a good relationship with the Government of Canada, and so do, I'm sure, many in our leadership. They know the answers from within their communities. If we can get this right, that's a good step in the right direction.

We've been studying this issue to death. It's time to make some movement to make sure that people are no longer being discriminated against and that the authority of the membership rests with first nations. Let's move towards that.

Billy Morin: I believe Mr. David is legal counsel for the Assembly of First Nations. I have a legal question, through you, National Chief, to your in-house legal.

Can you speak to the discrimination and charter aspects of this? If a challenge to the charter aspects of the second generation came through, what would be the implications? Would it be successful in the long run, in your legal opinion?

William David (In-House Senior Legal Counsel, Assembly of First Nations): It's hard to comment without knowing what the facts of such a challenge would be. There's a very good chance that the second-generation cut-off, in my view at least, would be held as not consistent with the charter. In looking at cases here, but also other cases that involve descendance and interactions with the charter, that's particularly true for section 6. I'm less clear about whether

that would hold for section 11, noting that the order, in this case, does not actually include section 11.

Billy Morin: Thank you, sir.

Maybe I'll go to Mario or Cynthia.

As a member of Parliament, I take great pride in being from this country and being first nation. I take great pride in being a Canadian. As a bit of a political nerd, for lack of a better word, and as a Canadian, I watched the CBC documentary *Canada: A People's History*. The first story in there, out of everything in Canada's history, is the extinction of the Beothuk in Newfoundland—the very first episode.

You mentioned that 80% of the Wendat under the age of 39 are subsection 6(2)s. You can see the end. You can see the extinction of your people. How does that reflect? Do you see one day when Canada is going to talk about the extinction of the Wendat as well?

Cynthia Lapierre: I'll jump in.

Kinanâskomitin. Thank you for your question, MP Morin.

I'm here representing myself. I'm not here to speak on behalf of my nation—the Wendat nation.

We see it every day, because 87% of registered Wendat aged zero to 39 are subsection 6(2) and can't transmit.

We see it in real time, as Mario mentioned. We have kids who are non-status and are disappearing into a system. They don't have access to the same rights. They can play hockey at school, but they can't play hockey in the tournament. Try telling that to those kids and making them understand when they're in grade 2.

We're seeing it. Projections that we've worked on suggest that in the next 50 to 70 years, my voice might be among one of the last of the Wendat people. We're facing that extinction head-on.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have MP Greaves for six minutes, please.

Will Greaves (Victoria, Lib.): Good morning, colleagues, and good morning to our witnesses. Thank you all for being with us today.

This issue is so challenging for the committee. We've heard testimony from witnesses—first nations leaders, chiefs and members of different nations, including today, of course—who are very clear and very strong in their support for the amendments contained in Bill S-2. They insist that the discrimination contained in the Indian Act has to end. It's incompatible with Canadian values, and it's an infringement upon the rights and dignity of first nations and indigenous people, particularly women.

We've also heard from representatives and leaders of other first nations and indigenous communities who say that while the discrimination in the Indian Act must end, they do not support these specific amendments because they view the idea that the government would change the Indian Act in a way that creates new members of those nations without the consent of those nations as an infringement on the Crown's duty to consult.

The work of this committee and the government is to find the best way forward between these two critical imperatives and these two principles, each of which is fundamental, but in this case, they are actually in some tension. There's the question around ending discrimination, and there's the question around the Crown's obligation to consult with indigenous peoples precisely in the way that it has not done historically and obviously did not do in the case of the Indian Act.

In that context, my first question is for the national chief.

Thank you for being with us today, Chief. You have advocated frequently for the need for first nations to have control over their own membership and their own citizenship. I'm wondering if you can elaborate on why self-government and control over membership are so fundamental to first nations, in your view.

• (0945)

Cindy Woodhouse-Nepinak: First of all, the longer we wait, the more our people will be impacted, so we must move forward without hesitation. First nations have been consulted on this question of status and citizenship since at least 1985. We're in this position because Indian status has been a reality in first nations communities since at least 1850. It is the federal government that legislated indigenous identity in the first place, and the federal government must take responsibility for discrimination under the legislation. First nations are ready to move forward in a good way and find a good path together, so there is no excuse for further delays.

First nations also agree that the second-generation cut-off should be removed. Solutions to this must be adequately co-developed with first nations rights holders. Some have voiced that the one-parent rule could be a potential option.

The AFN also urges Canada to prioritize first nations' perspectives and solutions on the second-generation cut-off. While the current indigenous advisory process led by ISC is an important step, the real solution will come from Canada creating multiple options and pathways for first nations rights holders to assert their laws and jurisdictions.

A solution to implement the changes to the Indian Act to remove the second-generation cut-off rule is long overdue. There will be an adjustment period in terms of the impact on first nations communi-

ties, but delaying that process and furthering discrimination within the Indian Act isn't doing any good.

The lack of resources within communities is a serious concern, but it cannot be used as an excuse to just pass the buck. Expanding entitlement without ensuring predictable, sustainable funding risks worsening critical gaps in housing, health and infrastructure, so recognition must be matched by these resources.

Will Greaves: Thank you for that answer, Chief.

Both in that response and in your opening statement, you made mention of co-development and the need for first nations and the federal government to co-develop policies that will affect first nations and indigenous peoples going forward. In that context, I will turn to Chief Smoke.

Thank you for being with us today, Chief. I understand that you have had experiences in your role in working with the federal government on these consultative processes. Could you speak to that experience? From your perspective, what have the outcomes of that been for you and for your nation?

Marsha Smoke: Good morning.

The Anishinabek Nation has been involved in the question of citizenship for many years. Our commissioner is Jeannette Corbiere Lavell, who was the original plaintiff for the paragraph 12(1)(b) case back in the 1970s.

From that time on, the Anishinabek Nation has always been involved in citizenship. More recently, we have participated in the collaborative process, because we felt it was important to make sure that our voices were there. We've done a lot of research. We've done a lot of work in communities on the other work that needs to be done by communities.

This is not something new for us. It's always been our responsibility to take care of our families and to take care of our children—our future generations. When it comes to any kind of legislation that's coming forward, implementation is our responsibility. It's up to our communities to do that.

We have been working alongside our communities for many years in looking at how membership would work in each nation. When we looked at the work that's going forward in the collaborative process, we made sure that we were there, that our voices were heard, because the work we have been doing has been ongoing for so long, and there's a history that we bring to the table.

One example was that I recently attended a meeting with—

• (0950)

The Chair: Thank you very much. We're over time.

You can send stuff in writing as well. If you want to give that example in writing to the clerk, we will have it. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

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

Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I believe the national chief can't hear the French interpretation.

Is it possible to check, Mr. Chair?

[*English*]

The Chair: She's nodding yes.

[*Translation*]

Marilène Gill: I'd like to thank each of the witnesses for being here today to testify about Bill S-2.

I was struck by what Chief Smoke said earlier. On the one hand, a number of people have talked about the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The government has made commitments. The words “discrimination”, “sexism” and “racism” were mentioned a number of times, as well as the word “colonialism” and the word “genocide”. All of this leads me to wonder why it takes so long to pass a bill. What are the reasons for that?

We're talking about discrimination and genocide. I don't think any argument could counter such harsh and powerful words.

Why is it taking so long to adopt Bills-2?

Chief Smoke could go first, but I would obviously like all the witnesses to answer my question.

[*English*]

Marsha Smoke: The time being spent looking at ways of delaying the bill is a smokescreen. I believe it's much broader than that. There are cumulative impacts of the Indian Act that have happened for decades and decades, almost two centuries—certainly for 150 years, but before that as well.

The issue of delay, along with the cumulative effect impacts, is all about the land. It's all about the resources. It's about our treaties. It's about all the court cases that first nations have won over the last few decades.

We are not going to stand back. We're not going to stand down in protecting our future generations and in being able to be brought back into our families. They are already in our circle, as it exists now, but it's important that they have that recognition in the same manner as their brothers, their cousins and so on.

It's clear in my mind that the delays are all about the land.

[*Translation*]

Marilène Gill: Chief Woodhouse-Nepinak, do you agree with what Chief Smoke said about what is preventing the House of Commons and, obviously, the Canadian Parliament, from moving forward to adopt Bill S-2?

[*English*]

Cindy Woodhouse-Nepinak: Absolutely. I agree with everything that she said.

For true co-development, any consultation process or reforms to the Indian Act must be first nations-led. However, without taking action, the federal government risks perpetrating further discrimination.

First nations are ready to decide for themselves who their members are. Canada needs to step out of the way. The government does not have the right to tell first nations what their background is. Delaying the removal of discrimination in the Indian Act undermines reconciliation.

We never created this. This was done to us by the Government of Canada with the creation of the Indian Act. We have a lot of work to do, but we can do that together and get there in a united way.

• (0955)

[*Translation*]

Marilène Gill: Thank you.

Ms. Lapierre, I saw you nodding your head. Do you want to add a comment?

Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

All the witnesses will be able to submit additional documents following the committee meeting, but, if you wish, you can also talk about your nation, the Wendat nation.

Cynthia Lapierre: Thank you, Mrs. Gill.

I am here as a private citizen, and I completely agree with what these great Anishinabe women are saying. I'm not a politician, I don't work in Parliament and I always wonder whether the government wants to follow the original intent of the Indian Act.

Does it intend to continue the genocide of our first nations?

I'm not a politician or a strategist, but I always wonder whether the government wants to continue on the same path. Since 1985, we've been losing people. We have said it at length at other times in our presentation: There is a difference between membership, where our nations decide who belongs, and the Indian register.

Personally, I think it's important to keep a register of people who are excluded. To take the example of my great-grandmother, it was very hard to prove, because Indian status didn't exist at the time. There was no list of all the women who were removed. If we continue to exclude people from the register, there has to be some kind of register to keep a record of those people.

Marilène Gill: In fact, you agree that, once again, any delay in passing Bill S-2 is tantamount to telling children that they are excluded, right?

I'm thinking of the letter you gave us earlier about Amélie Sioui, whose identity and future are being decided.

You agree that all the delays are leading to the disappearance of not only children, but an entire community, as I believe and as Mr. Huneault also said.

Is that correct?

Cynthia Lapierre: Yes, Mr. Huneault also said that.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. That's all the time we have.

Next is MP Morin for five minutes.

Billy Morin: Thank you, Chair.

I want to go to Chief Smoke.

We've talked a lot about a lot of things, like legislation and things that have evolved over, quite frankly, 150 years of the Indian Act. One latest development in Canada's history is that the current Liberal government wants to celebrate the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. They say they want to implement it. They say they want to help enforce it, but they're also saying at this time that they are essentially delaying...discrimination against women and girls when it comes to the second-generation cut-off.

Do you see consistency there, or is there a lack of consistency in upholding the declaration but keeping the delay going around getting rid of the second-generation cut-off?

Marsha Smoke: When we're talking about the UN declaration act, we have to remember that this piece of legislation was rushed through the government and brought to first nations with an imposed deadline by which it had to be dealt with. Any intent to look at that as being consistent with UNDRIP is highly questionable to me, but the intent to align legislation with UNDRIP is an important element. I still believe that there are many other factors playing into this beyond the question of just membership. That is where the delays are.

If we want to be honest, we can talk about costs, but with the amount of money that's being spent right now, cost doesn't seem to be a factor. It's not going to be a huge burden, if I can say, on the government, because the registration numbers in the past have not been in the thousands or millions that were predicted in years past.

If the government truly wants to align the Indian Act provisions on membership with UNDRIP, they need to get on with it, because they're not doing so right now.

• (1000)

Billy Morin: Thank you.

You mentioned cost. I tend to agree with you, because it's a \$25-billion budget, and the implementation costs on this, according to the government's own numbers from StatsCan and some of the internal Parliamentary Budget Officer numbers,

are \$5,000, \$6,000, \$7,000 or \$8,000 on average over 30 to 40 years. You're looking at direct costs of maybe \$2,000 per person to start for the FNIHB and for different things being implemented. I don't get the argument on costs and numbers. I do agree with you on that.

You also mentioned earlier that consultation is being weaponized. Can you elaborate on that?

Marsha Smoke: It's pretty clear that when it comes to consultation, we have always taken the position of free, prior and informed consent. I believe it's being weaponized this time, because it's being used as an excuse to delay.

We very much want to see consultation happen, but the consultation has been going on for a long, long time. To use that word as a reason to bring things to a stop doesn't match with either UNDRIP or the UNDRIP Act. It is being used as a tool to delay.

Billy Morin: Would you not agree that while there is some tension in membership versus status, at the end of the day, nations still have their ability, legally, to define who their own members are? Even that would be a tactic or an excuse not to get rid of the second-generation cut-off right now.

Marsha Smoke: Yes. When it comes to the membership of our citizens, we know who our families are. The people who are going to be applying for membership once this bill passes, in whatever form—hopefully as it exists right now—are not strangers. They're not strangers to our communities. They're members of families. They're people who as recently as 1985—

The Chair: Thank you.

Marsha Smoke: —are there. We know who they are.

Meegwetch.

The Chair: *Chi-meegwetch.*

Next, for five minutes, we have MP Earle.

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

Thank you, witnesses. I really appreciated the testimony this morning and in past committees. I'm guided by the wisdom that you bring to us at committee regarding this particular matter around Bill S-2. Through your testimony, you've certainly demonstrated the responsibility that I have as a parliamentarian and that this committee has to get this right, and I say that sincerely. I'll come to my question for the witnesses from that position.

It was Chief Smoke who said that nobody gets left behind, and I'd like you to build on that a little to give me comfort as somebody who will be part of writing this report. I've heard from all of the witnesses about the need for the assurance that nobody gets left behind, because the overarching theme of all the testimony I've heard today and in past committee meetings on this subject is that many have in some way been left behind.

Chief Smoke, can you talk to me about why nobody will be left behind?

Marsha Smoke: First of all, I want to say where that comes from. That's a teaching from my late mother, June Smoke, who always reminded us as children when we were growing up that if there's someone on the playground at school who has no one to play with, you go and talk to them; you go and make them feel a part of the community.

On that premise, we have to make sure we're working in a place of inclusion rather than exclusion. The exclusion part has been very effective when it comes to the legislative changes that were made in Bill C-31.

Philip Earle: Thank you.

Reading documents that I've been provided on this subject matter to prepare for a committee dealing with such important and deep subject matter, I'm drawn to a court case from the Superior Court in Quebec from 2017. In a similar fashion to this, changes were made. After changes were made by government, it was identified that there was a lack of information that got out to people who legitimately now had the ability to exercise the rights they were given through the changes that were made.

Cynthia Lapierre, maybe you can help. How do you feel we should be addressing getting that information out? Should it go out directly from the nations? Should it go out from the Crown? Could you speak to the committee about how you'd like to see that information distributed?

• (1005)

Cynthia Lapierre: To clarify, do you mean information about who is entitled or could be entitled?

Philip Earle: Exactly. If we accept the amendments as presented, the legislation changes. How would we get that detail out to people who may no longer have a deep connection to their community because of, if I may say so, the cut-off that happened?

Cynthia Lapierre: I can only share my story.

My whole life, I've known who I was, but I did not belong to my nation. No one since my great-grandmother had. As I mentioned, Indian status is something that was created around 1951, if I'm correct, and these things weren't documented. There weren't lists.

For example, with Bill C-31, changes had been made. Those people were contacted, and they became subsection 6(1) instead of subsection 6(2), and so forth. That's why I called it. We have to have this Indian registry of who the descendants are, because people have a right to know.

My great-grandmother... As of right now, I am the only one who has status. Trying to contact people to make people aware and bringing them back to community are really important. My journey

was about reconnecting with my community before asking for my status. Personally, that was my journey. There's a responsibility there to document the hurt, because some people don't know. There are people out there who have rights.

For me, it wasn't until I was working in Kahnawake that I learned about all of this. My granddaddy had never said that she lost status. I didn't know. As I learned what reconciliation was as a Franco-Ontarian woman, it was like finding out that you were adopted. It was like, "Wait a minute, this happened to my family. Wait a minute, this attacked me. Wait a minute, I was buried." I think it's important that Canada has this accountability to people to maintain those lists.

To close on that statement, we face lots of situations with people who affirm indigenous identities. Those lists would be useful tools to confirm identity. However, at the end of the day, our nations get to decide belonging.

Personally—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Cynthia.

Ms. Gill, go ahead for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I heard my colleague talk about a 2017 decision for the governance of the Cree first nation of Eeyou Istchee, for which information can be provided later.

An agreement was reached with that nation to give it more and more autonomy and powers, and even jurisdictions that belonged to Quebec and are now exercised by the Cree. No one can argue that we don't have all the information, because the agreement was made with the Cree. They're aware of it, and they agree.

We're talking about land use and economic development. I think that's absolutely positive. There's nothing stopping us from moving forward.

In closing, I know that the arguments tend to be more intellectual and therefore perhaps more clinical.

Ms. Lapierre, if possible, I'd like you to go back to the letter from young Amélie and speak on behalf of a generation that can't testify in committee. An 11-year-old child cannot appear before a committee.

I know this may be an emotional topic, but I think we're talking about human beings who have rights and who experience discrimination. I know I'm repeating myself, but I think it's extremely important. That's what makes these rights important: We are human and we stand in solidarity.

Do you want to simply talk about the impact on children?

I think that young Amélie also represents the children of every first nation.

• (1010)

Cynthia Lapierre: Thank you for your question, madam.

I've worked in a number of first nations communities where we see what we call ghosts. These are Wendat children, for example, who come to the longhouse, who take part in our ceremonies, who dance at pow-wows, who live in the community or nearby, or who have a connection to the community but are Quebeckers. Once they turn 18, their sense of belonging will be eroded.

That is what happened to my great-grandmother when she married a non-indigenous man. She had to leave her community. Like her, these children will have to leave the community at 18.

A Wendat mother who has non-status children, for example, can't go to the health centre in Wendake to get help. She has to go to a facility in the Quebec system. It's like telling an Albertan who comes to Quebec that they absolutely have to go to an anglophone hospital. These are injustices that children experience. Having experienced a disconnect myself for a large part of my life, I am here to defend their interests and membership rights, based on the standards that we will develop as a nation.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lapierre.

[English]

Thank you very much to everyone for your words today and for joining us.

Thank you to the national chief as well.

We're going to suspend for a bit to allow our witnesses to be excused, and then we are going to take up some committee business.

• (1010)

(Pause)

• (1015)

The Chair: We're back.

Thank you very much, everyone, for this. We're doing a bit of committee business. At the last meeting, the Conservatives asked me for some time today to speak to it. I believe MP Zimmer will be speaking for the Conservatives.

Go ahead.

Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): I'm bringing back the topic of the affordability study. I wanted to know where that was at, because I know it was agreed to in a previous committee meeting. I've since had a few conversations, and it sounds like it is going to move ahead.

Maybe you could clarify, Chair, where that's going.

The Chair: We passed it in its form. I believe the clerk has a copy of it. We passed it in its entirety.

I'm just going to read it, if you don't mind. It was translated in both official languages. It says:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs undertake a study of affordability challenges in northern Canada, with a focus on the rising costs of heating, food, housing and trans-

portation, provided that no fewer than five meetings be dedicated for the purposes of this study, that the Minister of Northern and Arctic Affairs be invited to appear for no less than two hours in relation to this study, that the committee's report include recommendations to the government to improve affordability in northern and Arctic communities and that the committee request a comprehensive government response to the report pursuant to Standing Order 109.

That is what we're discussing right now. I just wanted to read it into the record.

Go ahead.

Bob Zimmer: I just want to know when we're going to proceed.

The Chair: It's up to the committee. It's in the committee's hands. It's up to you guys to discuss that right now.

Bob Zimmer: We would like to move forward on it right away. I'd like to discuss it.

The Chair: All right.

MP Gill, go ahead.

[Translation]

Marilène Gill: Mr. Chair, in light of what just happened at the committee, I would like to point out the following.

We're working on Bill S-2. All the witnesses agree that this is urgent and that we should proceed with diligence. I think the positions are relatively entrenched. Therefore, I wonder why we would stop this study just to do another study.

Mr. Chair, I've asked this several times: I'd like us to have a work schedule, because we sort of decide on a piecemeal basis what we're going to do. I would like the committee to be more structured and to be able to discuss priorities. There is something on the table, we want to put it forward, but there is no substantive discussion on the committee's priorities, whether to do with deadlines or topics. I say that even though, as a member of Parliament for a northern riding, I completely agree with my colleague Mr. Zimmer on the benefit and importance of the study.

On the one hand, I would like to have a schedule, even if it may vary depending on what committee members agree on.

On the other hand, I'd also like to see if my colleagues agree that Bill S-2 should be prioritized and that we need to finish the study and move forward. Obviously, we may need a deadline for certain issues, but I would like it to be done in a diligent manner.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We have MP Hanley with his hand up online.

Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Good morning, everyone.

I just want to add my support for the affordability study. If the committee is in agreement, we could even run these two studies simultaneously. We could have a few more periods to hear about Bill S-2, and perhaps even establish the affordability study and have a couple of meetings before we take the summer recess.

Those of us in the north are hearing from our constituents—of course, not just in the north but especially in the north—about some of the latest challenges to affordability. I think it would be appropriate for us to get that study under way.

I would certainly support Mr. Zimmer's request to move on this in priority, even while we are still deliberating on Bill S-2.

• (1020)

The Chair: MP Morin, you have your hand up.

Billy Morin: I would like to add consideration of one thing to do before the summer break. We passed a motion to the effect that the minister would appear for one hour on Kashechewan. I understand that she visited the community and good things were said. The commitment from this committee was to hear from her for one hour in consideration of that crisis.

I think it's fair that she appear before the summer break, along with Kashechewan, according to that motion. It is an emergency. I don't want to take anything away from the north, because that's an emergency too. We've heard testimony that what's in Bill S-2 has been dealt with for 150 years, but an hour of this committee's time for the minister to come here before the start of the break, as per our motion, to address that crisis would be ideal.

The Chair: Okay, that's duly noted.

We'll go back to MP Zimmer's motion, which has been read into the record.

Go ahead, Jaime.

Jaime Battiste (Cape Breton—Canso—Antigonish, Lib.): I support looking at affordability in the north.

There's one thing we didn't quite finish in the indigenous policing study. The Parliamentary Budget Officer was supposed to get back to us with some numbers on how we could potentially give some solutions around policing as an essential service. That's something we should look to finish and get some recommendations on before we end for the summer.

I am in agreement with a study on northern affordability as part of this. I also agree that Bill S-2 is a priority and that we have some things to finish off there.

Mr. Chair, if we can put it in your hands, I think we have a general consensus about what we want to do before the end of the summer. If you work with the parties and create a timeline to get back to us, I think we can trust you to figure out how to ensure that all of these things get resolved before the summer. We all worked very hard this term, and we all want to get back to our constituencies and do some of the good work we need to do there.

The Chair: Okay, that's duly noted.

The PBO has gotten back to us with the information—the gap analysis that has been done—so we probably can set aside a meeting for that.

Next is MP Gill, and then I have MP Zimmer.

[*Translation*]

Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would just like to make a correction: No, there is no consensus. I prefer to speak for myself when I tell you this. There's no consensus as far as I'm concerned. Obviously, I would have liked to know why the priorities changed.

Of course, meetings can be called under Standing Order 106(4). If something is actually urgent, we don't wait two, three or four months before saying so. We start work immediately. That is the definition of urgent.

Those are my comments. I look forward to the work schedule that will take us to the end of the parliamentary period, which is in June.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

MP Zimmer, you had your hand up.

Bob Zimmer: Thank you again for the consideration. I appreciate it—and Brendan too.

As part of this, we were also discussing being in the community. It's really important. Brendan and Lori would probably relate to the costs. It's one thing to say it in Ottawa, but it's another thing to see the sticker shock when you walk into a grocery store up in Iqaluit or wherever, so I would propose that we travel as well, whether we go to one place or two. If it's two, my perfect scenario would be to see Inuvik, on the western side of the Arctic, and to see, on the eastern side, at least Iqaluit. They're relatively easy to get to on an airplane. Any of the other remote communities are even better to visit, but they're much more difficult to get to.

That's what I would propose, but I'll leave it up to you to let us know what's possible. Part of the planning should be to do some of the planning work before, even pre-summer, because some of that work should be done sooner rather than later.

The Chair: What we can do is call for a vote, because there's not a consensus on doing what they call “concurrent studies”, which means doing them at the same time. Then I will work with the clerk and vice-chairs to map out the timing.

Things keep changing, but it is the will of the committee that sets the agenda. I'm just your chair.

Go ahead, MP Idlout.

• (1025)

Lori Idlout: Before you call the question, can you clarify something? For example, being new to the committee, I didn't know there was a lot of unfinished business, including what MP Morin said about Kashechewan and how the minister would appear. I think that still needs to happen. I agree that it is an emergency as well, so when you're calling—

The Chair: That could be part of the concurrence.

Lori Idlout: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: On the concurrence of studies, we're going to do work.... This happens in other committees. It's my 11th year here, and we've done a lot of different studies at the same time. I appreciate everyone's work. You're always prepared and contributing greatly on the matters we have here.

Before we go to a vote, I see MP Gill had a hand up.

[*Translation*]

Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Obviously, I leave it in your hands to plan for travel as Mr. Zimmer proposed.

I know that Canada and Quebec are huge, but I would like it to be possible sometimes to include northern Quebec as well. I would really appreciate it if you could think about that region.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, I agree.

All those in favour of doing concurrent studies—what we just talked about—raise your hands.

(Motion agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

The meeting is adjourned.

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