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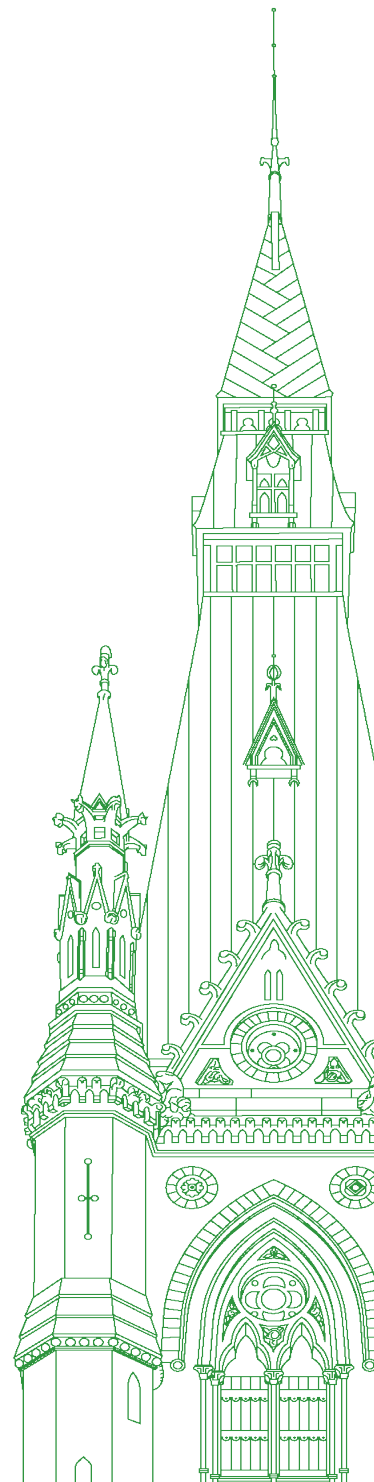
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Chair: Ms. Marilyn Gladu



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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)): I call this meeting to order. Welcome, everybody, to meeting number 20 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

We are here today to consider the supplementary estimates for 2020-21 and the main estimates for 2021-22. The clerk distributed the supplementaries to the committee on February 18 and the mains on February 26.

We want to welcome the Honourable Maryam Monsef, Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, as well as senior officials from the Department for Women and Gender Equality Canada. We have Guylaine Roy, Nancy Gardiner and Lisa Smylie.

We're glad to have you here. Minister, we'll give you five minutes to make your opening remarks and then we'll go into our questions.

Please go ahead.

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister for Women and Gender Equality): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Hello, colleagues. *Bonjour. Aaaniin. As-salaam alaikum.* I hope you're safe and well, and I wish the same for your loved ones.

I appreciate the opportunity to be with you today to thank you for all your important work, to speak with you about the progress that we all must work together to protect, about the path ahead, about the supplementary estimates, of course, and how we can work together to ensure that all women are able to benefit from the prosperity of this country and that those hardest hit by COVID-19 are able to land on their feet.

Let me first, though, acknowledge that a year ago on this day with the pandemic being declared, our lives changed forever. Women ended up taking the majority of the responsibilities for care for their loved ones in their chosen professions on the front lines of the fight against COVID-19. Women experienced higher rates of gender-based violence. With their kids at home and the elders they care for, increases in unpaid care responsibilities were realities for far too many. Women lost jobs faster than men, and those jobs are returning at a lower pace than men's. Without women in our economies and in our communities, Canada will not be able to achieve its full potential.

I would like to thank the Government of Canada's public service employees for all the ways they have pivoted, including our interpreters who ensure we're heard in both official languages, and their families for sharing them and for living with you as you take care of all other Canadians in this very difficult time.

My own team members, Guylaine Roy, deputy minister; Nancy Gardiner, assistant deputy minister; and the amazing, wears-many-hats Lisa Smylie, have been instrumental in moving us forward in key areas like ensuring that some 1,500-plus organizations received funds directly in their bank accounts in the early days of COVID-19 to make sure that they kept their doors open, stayed safe and offered a place of refuge for women, non-binary folks and children in their hour of need.

My team also ensured that, despite COVID-19, we were able to gather provincial and territorial ministers responsible for the status of women and get a historic agreement to move forward with Canada's first national action plan to end gender-based violence. The very same team, just a couple of days ago, hosted a two-day virtual summit which convened thousands of feminists from across the country so that their voices—the experts and their lived experiences—would shape the decisions that the federal government would be making. This is the same team that is going to be deploying, through the 2021-22 main estimates, the \$125.5 million to support, through grants and contributions, the capacity building of women's organizations and LGBTQ2 organizations as well as support the national strategy to combat human trafficking and ensure survivors have what they need.

We have made progress. We stood in the House of Commons not too long ago commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women report being tabled. We now apply an intersectional gender lens to all our decisions, including the upcoming budget and our COVID-19 response. There are 100 women in the House of Commons. Senate is at parity. There are more women at the table now than ever before. Our voices matter. Our voices count. We're collecting gender disaggregated data. Tens of thousands of women have received support through the national housing strategy and have a safe and affordable roof over their heads. We've cut child poverty by some 40% through the child benefit, and the Canada child benefit has received additional supports for families directly into their bank accounts in this very difficult year that has been the pandemic.

We also have a women entrepreneurship strategy, the first of its kind, scaling up and supporting women entrepreneurs. We need them on our [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] employing others and contributing to the vibrancy of their communities and our country.

• (1105)

The universal broadband fund is not only going to connect every single household to high-speed Internet, but it's also addressing the cell gaps that create too many highways of tears in too many corners of this great country and putting at risk too many of our daughters, as we heard, in the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls testimony and report.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but that's your time, Minister. We'll catch the rest in the questions, though.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I thought I had one more minute, but that's okay.

The Chair: No.

We're going to start with Ms. Sahota for six minutes.

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

I concur with the minister on the significance of this day, and I want to thank all the women across this country for doing what they did over the last year, and standing up with their families, taking care of their families and their neighbours.

Madam Chair, before I proceed to my question for the minister, I would like to bring to the committee members' attention, the following motion that I intend to move during committee business:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of sexual misconduct within the Canadian Armed Forces, including a review of Operation HONOUR; that the evidence and documentation received by the committee during the first session of the 42nd parliament in the report titled "A Force for Change Creating a Culture of Equality for Women in the Canadian Armed Forces" be taken into consideration by the committee in the current session; that the following witnesses be invited to appear before the committee: the Chief of Defence Staff; the Minister of Defence; the Canadian Forces Ombudsman; Lt.-Gen. Frances Allen, the Vice-Chief of Defence Staff; the Commander of the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service; It's Just 700; Dawn McIlmoyle-Knott; retired Master Corporal Stéphanie Raymond and retired Supreme Court Justice Marie Deschamps.

Minister, are you familiar with your mandate letter from the Prime Minister dated December 13, 2019?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Yes.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Okay.

Minister, in paragraph 11 of the letter it says, and I quote:

We are committed to evidence-based decision-making that takes into consideration the impacts of policies on all Canadians and fully defends the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. You will apply Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) in the decisions that you make.

Then in paragraph 15, bullet point two says:

Work to ensure that rigorous Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) is performed on all Cabinet proposals from every department.

Recently it has been reported that two individuals were assaulted, one isolating at a government hotel and the other at home, one sexually by a quarantine screening officer.

Minister, given your requirement from the Prime Minister to ensure all policies undergo a GBA+, did you at any time highlight how these policies may keep women protected, and if so, how did the Prime Minister and cabinet respond?

• (1110)

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you for that very important question, MP Sahota.

As a sister, an aunt, a woman, and of course as the minister responsible for the well-being of women, when those reports of sexual assault came out, I was as outraged and as disappointed as you all were. I can assure you that we are looking into the matter, and that the investigation is ongoing. We will get to the bottom—

Ms. Jag Sahota: Minister, that's not my question. My question is, did you at any time highlight how these policies make—

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): I have a point of order, Madam Chair. We cannot hear the minister's answer. Everyone has trouble hearing the minister.

The Chair: Is it volume related?

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Yes.

The Chair: I think they can adjust in the room perhaps, according to the clerk.

That's very good, sorry to interrupt.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Is this better, Madam Chair, and Ms. Sidhu?

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Yes.

The Chair: Yes, now it's good.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Some of you are shaking your heads and some of you are saying yes.

The Chair: It's better now, go for it.

I'll add the time.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: We apply an intersectional gendered lens to every decision so we can better understand the impact of the decisions we're making and then mitigate them. Our intersectional gendered lens, applied through the entirety of our COVID response, has been recognized internationally as being the best. We work every day to improve that process, and if this committee has any ideas on how we can sharpen GBA+, Madam Chair, I'm all ears.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Minister, on July 7, Minister Qualtrough appeared before the committee—I believe you were there as well—and she said that you did not apply a GBA+ analysis to all the programs and policies.

Are you now starting to apply it?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, we've applied the GBA+ to our entire COVID response. I was here for that committee meeting. Minister Qualtrough was referring to the CERB, which we rolled out within a matter of days. We weren't able to do the formal GBA+ on that particular measure right away, but you can be sure that we did so as soon as it was feasible. Our first priority was to get the money into people's bank accounts so that they could follow public health orders and stay safe and not worry about putting food on the table and putting a roof over their heads.

We can all agree that poverty is sexist and CERB would have helped women disproportionately—

Ms. Jag Sahota: Minister Monsef, I'm going to move on to the next question since you're not really answering my first question.

You have a mandate from the Prime Minister to Canadians that you will ensure that all cabinet proposals will undergo a GBA+. Canadian women are fed up with this government's continued talk and no action. Because of your inaction, you placed these two women in harm's way, because you did not do your job.

Minister, today we are reviewing estimates for your department. Why should we approve them when you consistently fail Canadian women?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, I disagree entirely with the premise of that question.

While it is true that gender-based violence is far too prevalent in this country, no government has done more than our government has to provide supports to front lines, to acknowledge it in legislation and to support particularly racialized and indigenous community organizations in their efforts to prevent and address it.

If my honourable colleague wants to vote against funding for human-trafficking supports, or LGBTQ2 organizations, or women who are working on the front lines of the shadow pandemic—

The Chair: I'm sorry, but that's your time. Now we're going to Monsieur Serré.

[Translation]

You have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Madam Minister, for your presentation and for all the work that you're doing across the country to support women and organizations, especially during this challenging pandemic period.

I also want to thank all the organizations, staff and volunteers that support women's organizations, such as the Horizon Women's Centre in West Nipissing in my constituency, Nickel Belt, and the Centre Victoria pour femmes in Greater Sudbury. They have all told me that they greatly appreciate the additional funding that we provided because of COVID-19.

I also want to draw attention to your work on rural issues, among other things. I want to acknowledge Judith Erola, the member of Parliament for Nickel Belt, who was the first woman minister responsible for the status of women, in 1981. It's incredible that she was the first woman. There were four women members of Parliament at that time.

Here's my question, Madam Minister. What's the difference between the feminist response and recovery fund and the funding normally obtained through calls for proposals?

• (1115)

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you, Mr. Serré, for your leadership and hard work.

[English]

MP Serré, I know this has been a difficult time for you and your team, and despite those challenges, you've helped your community get connected to high-speed Internet, and here you are championing women and gender equality.

The \$100-million feminist response and recovery fund, for which we continue to encourage applications, is different from previous funds in that it focuses particularly on those populations that are underserved, under-represented and hardest hit by COVID. Black, indigenous, racialized, rural, young, seniors, we know that these particular groups as well as LGBTQ2 Canadians have been hardest hit by COVID.

This fund is also very flexible in that unless you are a private entity, you qualify for funding. The idea here is that if you have a solution to ensure the health and safety of women and non-binary folks, if you have a solution to help improve the workforce participation of women in this pandemic and moving forward, and if you have ways that you can increase the representation of diverse women's voices around decision-making tables, we want to work with you, and we encourage you to apply. Applications are open until March 24.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Madam Minister.

I'm hearing from local organizations about the flexibility we have now with a lot of these different programs and they are able to apply. Also, working closely with the province, in our case, Ontario, has really been a blessing to a lot of the local organizations, so thank you for your leadership in engaging all levels of government on that.

Madam Minister, you have a dual role. You're the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and also the Minister of Rural Economic Development, which is a really interesting and appropriate link to your testimony today. We have a study on the effect on women in rural areas. We heard a lot from witnesses about the challenges of the Internet, the challenges of social services, and the link to making sure that we keep women safe in rural Canada.

I want to give you the opportunity to explain a bit more about our new program that we've launched. It's historic funding—it's never been given by a federal government—for a universal broadband fund. How is that helping organizations and women's organizations all over Canada, especially in rural areas?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I can say that our rural MPs, like you and MP Hutchings, have been instrumental in shaping the universal broadband fund. It is meant to connect the last mile of households that have yet to be connected to this essential service.

We launched it on November 9, and in a few days, the call will close. Because of investments that we made in our first mandate, by the end of 2020, tens of thousands of households had access to the Internet. By the end of this year, about a quarter of a million households will have that high-speed connection. That's above and beyond what the universal broadband fund will do.

There is a rapid response component to the UBF, as it's affectionately known in our midst. It is meant to support projects that can have shovels in the ground this construction season and wrap up by the end of this year. We expect to see tens of thousands of households getting connected through this.

Madam Chair, let me also thank this committee for the very important work that it has done in focusing on rural women. We have been applying a rural lens to the entirety of our COVID response as part of the “plus” in the GBA+ that has been sharpened. That's helped us understand particularly the realities of younger and older women in rural communities.

As this committee continues its important work, I highly encourage it to take into account the importance of early learning and child care, particularly how difficult and unique the needs will be in rural Canada. As you've heard from the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, universal early learning and child care is a priority for our government.

I know that this committee cares what happens to rural women. We can't let the mistakes of the past be repeated. In the last recession, rural women were the last to recover from COVID, particularly those with children.

• (1120)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Serré.

Ms. Larouche, you have six minutes.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank the minister and the other witnesses for being here today to talk about investments that may help women. At least, that's our hope.

During the pandemic, more women lost their jobs, particularly because they held precarious jobs. They also lost their jobs because they had to make the choice to stay home and take care of their families. We saw these realities during the pandemic.

There's also the whole issue of violence. Almost 10% of women feared being victims of violence in the home during the pandemic. In Quebec, there were five femicides in two months. Five women have already died. I'm saying this because this figure hurts. It's unacceptable in 2021.

You also spoke about senior women. They ended up isolated and alone at home. They may not have lost their jobs, but they have been hit hard by the increase in grocery costs, rent and COVID-19 taxes. All the costs have increased for these senior women, but their purchasing power hasn't increased. They had to make difficult choices at the end of the month: housing, food or medication.

You also referred to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada's report from 50 years ago. Even then, there was talk about the importance of pay equity for women and the importance of achieving it. Legislation was passed in Parliament. We look forward to women being able to experience this equity. We look forward to the government setting an example.

These are only a few issues that have come to light as a result of the pandemic.

I want to address the supplementary estimates. Money is needed to help women. One thing that stands out in this analysis is the fact that \$8.7 million set aside for women wasn't spent before the end of last year, or between March and December 2020. The amount is being carried forward in the estimates.

Why weren't we able to spend the \$8.7 million?

It seems that the needs were there. Quebec may have known what to do with it, especially in cases of domestic violence.

[English]

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you, Madam Larouche.

I want to acknowledge that Quebeckers have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic, with half of the deaths to COVID being mourned by Quebeckers who are missing their loved ones. You're absolutely—

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Madam Chair, we don't have any interpretation.

Can the minister lift up her microphone?

[English]

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Forgive me. Let me try that again.

Madam Larouche, I want to acknowledge that Quebeckers are mourning. More than half of the deaths due to COVID in Canada have been Quebeckers. The whole country mourns with you.

You're also right in that the rates of violence have gone up and that our partnership with Quebec has been instrumental in providing supports to front-line organizations. There is \$17.46 million in emergency COVID funds specifically focused on addressing gender-based violence that has gone directly to the Government of Quebec, and they have deployed those dollars to the front line. We're doing that work.

You also made mention of our elders and how they have been harmed. Increases in OAS and GIS have supported our elders. Supports for front-line organizations in the community to be able to better support them have also been part of our priority.

You asked about the funding that my team has been rolling out to the front line. I will perhaps ask my wonderful deputy minister, Guylaine Roy, to respond to that aspect of your question.

• (1125)

[Translation]

Ms. Guylaine F. Roy (Deputy Minister, Department for Women and Gender Equality): Thank you, Madam Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

You asked a question about the supplementary estimates (C). You wanted to know why \$8.7 million was apparently not spent. What happened?

My response is the following. In fall 2020, an additional \$50 million was provided—

[English]

The Chair: Madam Larouche, we'll go back to you, because the screen is frozen.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: It's a real shame. I would have liked to hear her response.

Ms. Guylaine F. Roy: It's a technical matter. The money couldn't be spent before December 31, as required by the legislation. We reached an agreement with Quebec after that date. We're making sure that, in the vote, the \$8.7 million is there for Quebec. As the minister said, a total of \$17.46 million in emergency funding was provided for Quebec.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: So it's simply because there was no agreement with Quebec before December 31.

Ms. Guylaine F. Roy: Exactly. The legislation required that the money be spent before December 31. It's a technical matter. However, the money is there for Quebec.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Okay.

In the main estimates, obviously the amount—

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry. That's the end of your time.

Now we're going to Ms. Mathysen for six minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: I just regret that the technical issues cost me some time.

[English]

The Chair: Yes.

We'll go to Ms. Mathysen for six minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you.

Minister, going back to your mandate letter, it also says that the Prime Minister expects you to “drive systemic change that promotes a fairer and more productive society for women by improving quality of life, advancing leadership and addressing gender-based violence.”

Do you believe it's your role as the minister to address those systemic barriers that women face when it comes to being heard, believed and trusted when they come forward to say they have been a target of gender-based violence, even if it's in our armed forces, and even when it's a cabinet colleague who ignores them?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, it is the responsibility of every single one of us to ensure that survivors are heard and that they have the supports they need when they have the courage to come forward. Absolutely I take my responsibility seriously. I'm also fortunate that I'm not the only one around the table who takes on that burden. It is up to all of us.

My colleague referred to the armed forces and the troubling allegations that continue to come forward. If I may, Madam Chair, let me thank every single survivor who has the courage to step up and to share her story. These silence breakers have the ability to give courage to those who are suffering in silence.

Our government is determined to improve the processes so that it's not a matter of confidentiality or lack of trust in these organizations that prevent more victims from coming forward and that we create spaces and institutions and workplaces where all women and non-binary folks can feel safe and that they belong.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Well, that's interesting, but in fact, when a woman did come forward and determined that she needed that confidentiality, she was not listened to. Her complaint was refused by the minister.

I was hoping you could tell us. In your opinion, do you think it was appropriate that the PCO asked the ombudsman, Mr. Walbourne, for the name of the complainant?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I think the characterization here, Madam Chair, is inaccurate. There was a process in place to protect the privacy and the confidentiality of victims. That process was followed, a process that we now know needs to be significantly improved. You've heard the Prime Minister. You've heard the Minister of Defence. We're doing exactly that. These institutions can be stubborn in their resistance to change, but our government is committed to ensuring that all survivors feel heard and respected and that they're given the care they need.

I hope that this particular individual, whose name we do not know because she didn't wish us to know, has the support and the care she needs and that all survivors who are being triggered by the nature of the allegations, the testimonies and the coverage have the support they need as well.

• (1130)

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Minister, the reason that complaint was not heard and that the investigation didn't happen is that the ombudsman at the time wouldn't release her name to the PCO, and the PCO in fact demanded to know her name. Do you think that was appropriate? Do you think that's actually protecting victims in this instance?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: It is clear, Madam Chair, that the processes in place are far from perfect, and every time a survivor comes forward, we better understand the gaps in those processes.

As you've heard, every single member of our government who has been asked about this...we are committed to making this better and we are committed to ensuring that we're all working towards a future where no one has to say "Me too". We're all working towards a future where no victim feels afraid of the system. We're working towards a future where survivors have trust and confidence in the system and they feel free and open to share their names and the details so that justice can be pursued.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: What I'm hearing.... I mean, ultimately, the minister refused to hear any sort of complaint brought forward by Mr. Walbourne. You say that he has followed the processes, but ultimately, there are huge problems with the processes.

Is your department involved in trying to rectify this in taking the recommendations from the Deschamps report? Are your ministry and your department actively seeking the change that you say is so necessary within the Department of National Defence?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Absolutely we are. As you know, Madam Chair, we're working on the national action plan on gender-based violence. The Department of National Defence was always a strong partner in the next phase of our government's response to gender-based violence within the military, but we're expediting some of the measures, and we're also going to be working very

closely with the Department of National Defence in a whole-of-government approach to make sure we improve these processes.

We can do better. Women in uniform deserve better. Just look at what they're doing in long-term care homes. Look at what they're doing on the front lines of the fight against COVID and in delivering vaccines. These are noble professions, and every single Canadian who joins the forces deserves to be safe and respected, and we are committed to creating the conditions to do that.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: So—

The Chair: Very good. Now we will go to our second round of questions.

We are going to have Ms. Shin for five minutes.

Ms. Nelly Shin (Port Moody—Coquitlam, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for being here, Minister. I appreciate your willingness to hear questions.

Minister, in the Prime Minister's mandate letter to you, he asked you to "develop a National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence, with a focus on ensuring that anyone facing gender-based violence has reliable and timely access to protection and services". As you know, the pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing gaps of assistance toward women. Because of lockdowns, women facing domestic violence are challenged in regard to their exits. It's been a year since the pandemic lockdown. How are Canadian women safer today than a year ago?

On that note, how are indigenous women and girls safer today than a year ago? You haven't released an action plan in response to the report. I asked you this question at committee in July of last year. How are they safer today? What is the process you're in right now in response to that?

In addition to this list of questions, my concern right now is the culture of gaslighting women, which I'm not very happy with. I know we want to counter that, but when you have the Minister of Defence abdicating, and the government covering up for that, to me that is treating the trauma of these women as just invisible. You can say all the nice things and show solidarity through words, but if there's no action.... Then we have these hotel quarantine situations with sexual assaults.

I mean, it's not a safe place right now. It needs to be safer. Can the minister commit to these points and share with us today what has actually been done to make Canada a safer place for women a year after the lockdown?

• (1135)

Hon. Maryam Monsef: MP Shin, I share your frustration, and I want to assure you that in the past five years, more has been done to create greater safety and support for Canadian women than in, I would say, decades, probably not since the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Because of just my own government department, not the whole government but just my own, six million Canadians received supports and care—

Ms. Nelly Shin: Minister, I'd like to interject, because I've heard that answer before.

I appreciate your sensibility to those other areas, but the reality is that women are being traumatized. They're being raped. It not really being dealt with. Look at the rural broadband and the lack of support there. Counselling is online. These women in rural areas can't even access counselling. These are traumatized women.

I'd like to challenge you, woman to woman: How can you help these women, who are the most vulnerable, who are being physically violated and sexually violated, get the support they need? I think you would agree with me that it's very important that they do find this.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I do. I think the close to 2,000 organizations we have funded in rural communities and indigenous communities and urban centres for racialized women, for indigenous women, for Black women and for those with disabilities have been a lifeline. Just during COVID, I can say that in their hour of need, close to a million women and children have been able to find support.

That support was there for them because our government reached out to our partners across the country. They told us, "Give us funding, and we'll take care of those who need our help." We did that. We trusted them with those funds—

Ms. Nelly Shin: So, Minister, will you then ask your colleagues to shut down this debacle with the hotel quarantine situation? Not one more woman should have to be afraid and risk going there to be assaulted.

Can you commit to that? All those things really add up to nothing if it's in your power to do something about the situation right now.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: For about a million women and children who have received supports because of our government's investment in front-line organizations, I would say that this support has been more than nothing. It has been a lifeline. As someone who has stayed in one of those places in her hour of need, I can assure you that it's made a world of difference.

Ms. Nelly Shin: I know it's made a difference—

Hon. Maryam Monsef: We will do more. We will do more.

Ms. Nelly Shin: —but if these women continue to face the fear of sexual assault and actually experience it, and you have a defence minister who keeps covering up, and a Prime Minister who keeps covering up, this is not good for our country.

I really, really wish, and I will pray, that you will continue to receive the wisdom to deal with this so that we all feel safe.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: MP Shin, there is no cover-up. If anything, we're out there talking openly about the processes that need to be improved. We're out there sharing data about the increases in gender-based violence. We're working on a national action plan on gender-based violence, which can only move forward with provinces and territories.

Ms. Nelly Shin: It's been a year since the lockdown and I don't think women are safer.

We're reading these things in the headlines and we've passed—

The Chair: I'm sorry. That's your time.

Now we're going to Ms. Sidhu for five minutes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for coming here today.

Thank you to all of the officials for being with us today.

Minister, you are championing feminist recovery at the cabinet table with initiatives such as the feminist response and recovery fund.

Recently, Canada was recognized by CARE International as having the most gender responsive plan to address COVID-19. Kudos to you and your team.

Minister, this week you hosted the Canada Feminist Response and Recovery Summit, with experts from across Canada, including women witnesses who had already appeared at our committee. I attended an interesting session on the topic of the care economy.

Minister Monsef, can you please elaborate on what you're hearing from experts? Can you provide us with an update on how we are supporting our carers, particularly our marginalized women who provide care for Canadians?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you very much, MP Sidhu.

Congratulations on the vote in the House of Commons yesterday on your private member's bill on the framework for diabetes. I know you've been working on that since day one of being a member of Parliament. Your constituents are very smart to have sent you to Ottawa. That work is going to make a big difference.

You're right. The summit included many sessions, including one on women in the care economy. These are women who are working as early learning and child care workers. They are personal support workers. They are looking after those with disabilities and exceptionalities in group homes, for example.

It turns out that our entire economy is built on care at its core. These women have been doing the heavy lifting.

MP Sidhu, you're from Brampton and you also know that COVID has disproportionately asked more of racialized women than others. We saw yesterday in the stats that those racialized women have died due to COVID more than others.

What this means for us moving forward on long-term care homes means having standards, and respecting and valuing the work that is typically done by women. What it means in the meantime is our government has supported provinces and territories with some \$3 billion for pandemic pay, the wage top-up for those care workers who are essential to our ability to fight COVID.

One of the conversations our society is reckoning with aside from, as MP Shin and others said, gender-based violence and the culture that creates the conditions for too many vulnerable women, is the conversation we need to have about the true value of care work in our society. If so many women are doing so much unpaid work, if so many women are staying home because they don't have access to quality care, then our economy is not going to come roaring back.

The opportunity here, aside from better respecting care workers and ensuring that there are frameworks and standards in place so that long-term care homes are safer for staff and residents, is the need for universal early learning and child care. Without it we'll stay in a much less than ideal performing economy, and Canadians can do better.

We saw with Quebec that there's a model that works. It gets women back to work and it helps the economy be more productive. That's certainly an exciting opportunity for women and our government to pursue, with provinces and territories, of course.

• (1140)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

Throughout this year, the shadow pandemic has been a common point of concern and discussion. In my area, Peel Region, the police have seen an increase in the number of calls they get to respond to issues of domestic and gender-based violence over this pandemic.

Earlier the Prime Minister and you announced \$50 million in support to organizations serving women and their families who are fleeing violence and later, this past fall, announced an additional \$50 million fund.

Minister, can you update us on how much of the \$100 million in COVID-19 relief funding has gone to organizations? How many organizations will receive it?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Yes. Not including Quebec, in over 1,000 we changed some of the contribution agreements with existing organizations that we had agreements with so they'd have more flexibility. For Quebec, with the first instalment, about 200 were supported. With the next instalment we expect at least another 200 will be supported.

The Chair: That's your time.

[Translation]

Ms. Larouche, I'll give you an additional 30 seconds because of the technical issues that you encountered.

You have three minutes.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll go back to the question that I was about to ask the minister when my first comments were interrupted.

I'll continue with this analytical mindset. In the main estimates, we can see that the amount allocated in 2021-22 is even lower than the amount allocated last year before the supplementary estimates.

In the department, do people really think that the crisis or the feminist recovery will generate fewer resources than last year? I'm trying to get a handle on the figure.

How will the money be allocated to Quebec and the provinces? We know that Quebec and the provinces are already running programs. They need transfers. How will the money be transferred?

You spoke about the national action plan and said that you wanted to address violence. You said that you spent two days with women. Will more money be needed to implement this plan? Is there a target date and are there examples of these measures? Could these measures have prevented the assaults that we've seen in the military or during the quarantines?

• (1145)

[English]

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, do I have time to answer?

Our agreement with Quebec is working well. We were happy to hear finally that it's ready to be signed and that organizations can receive funds for the next phase of instalments. Quebec has said it will act as an observer in the national action plan on gender-based violence for the time being.

Guylaine, perhaps you'd like to add a little more to that.

[Translation]

Ms. Guylaine F. Roy: Thank you, Madam Minister.

If I may, I want to answer Ms. Larouche's question regarding the main estimates for 2020-21 compared to 2021-22, and the reason for the decrease.

If you compare the main estimates from one year to the next, the \$4.3 million decrease is mainly the result of a commemoration fund for missing and murdered women that expired in 2020-21. That's the technical reason for the \$4.3 million decrease.

Regarding the agreements with Quebec, I want to add that we have emergency funding agreements. Quebec is responsible for distributing the money.

[English]

The Chair: Very good.

Now we're going to Ms. Mathyssen for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

There has been a lot of talk from your government about the delivery of a national child care system, but in all of the talk, all of the speeches and throne speeches and so on, a lot of the numbers fall short of what's actually necessary.

The key stakeholders within child care have asked for an immediate \$2.5 billion, which actually your government agreed to do in a unanimous consent motion in the House, but it has failed to do so yet.

They are also asking for \$10 billion over the next five years. They have also requested a piece of legislation to put forward a universal child care act.

We also heard in testimony on Tuesday from witnesses that this will only continue to create a piecemeal approach in terms of child care.

Will we be able to see that full funding in the upcoming budget?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, I too look forward to the upcoming budget, the first to be tabled in the House of Commons by a woman finance minister.

I would say that the \$450 million set aside for skills training and the workforce development on early learning and child care workers is a significant first step in building a system that provides that quality of affordable, accessible care.

On building a secretariat within the Government of Canada, as you can appreciate, this has been mostly done within our provincial and territorial jurisdictions. That secretariat is going to create the capacity for the federal government to do its part.

We already have created more than 40,000 child care spaces in Canada. When the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister say that they have their noses to the grindstone on this one, those are words I take seriously, because never before have we seen the private sector and governments and Canadians on board with the idea of universal early learning and child care as we've seen—

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: One of the key things is that while all that money is a first step, it still falls short and it doesn't get the job done. Are you willing to do what it takes to get the job done and provide the full funding being asked for by key stakeholders in the child care sector?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: MP Mathyssen, we're working very closely with them. We are short of about 15,000 child care workers in Canada right now. We can't build a system without the mostly women who look after our kids, so that's a priority.

Minister Hussen has also held a federal-provincial-territorial meeting with his counterparts. I was fortunate to be there, and provinces—

The Chair: I'm sorry. That's your time.

Now we're going to Ms. Sahota for four minutes.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, I'm going to build on what my colleague MP Shin had asked you. I'm going to give you some statistics.

One in three women and girls in Canada will face some sort of gender-based violence in their lifetime. That is 6,373,323 women and girls.

At your last appearance here at the committee, when you appeared for main estimates, you refused to answer my question about when we would see the national action plan to address gender-based violence. Our allies such as Australia, Belgium, Finland, France, Norway and the United Kingdom have all developed national action plans, and in some cases, are already working on versions two and three.

You've been giving a lot of fluffy answers, but fluffy answers don't solve the problems. Actions do, and we do not have a national action plan from you. You're sitting here and telling us that you're protecting women, that you're defending women, that you're standing up for women, yet there's no action plan.

Can you tell me when that action plan is coming and how, by not having that, you're protecting and standing up for women?

• (1150)

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, our federal strategy to address and prevent gender-based violence was the first of its kind, so Canada is moving to phase two of its plan to address and prevent gender-based violence with a national action plan.

The last time I was here, I shared with this committee that we have to speak with our provincial and territorial counterparts. We did that, and we are moving forward. I encourage my colleague to look at the record of decision that came from that meeting.

When we put forward that federal strategy on gender-based violence, the Conservative Party of Canada voted against it. I am hopeful that this time the Conservative Party of Canada will support our measures to ensure that every woman is safe.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Minister, you didn't answer my question, but I'm going to go on to the next one and hope you will answer that one.

With the explosive revelations of rampant sexual misconduct in the highest ranks of our military, how many conversations have you had with the Minister of National Defence and the Prime Minister about how this government is failing women who choose to serve in uniform for their country? What specific recommendations have you made?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, I thought I answered the previous question in a lot of detail. If my colleague would like more information, I'm happy to provide it.

I can assure her too that I'm in regular conversation with my colleagues about the need to improve processes and the culture within these institutions so that all women can feel safe and feel like they belong.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Have you read the June 2019 committee report, "A Force for Change: Creating a culture of equality for women in the Canadian Armed Forces" and looked at the recommendations we made to the government?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Yes. We've been very fortunate that FEWO undertook that study. We appreciated it in June, and certainly we've been reviewing it further.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Minister, following instructions from you and your deputy, Ms. Roy, at your last FEWO appearance, we've had testimony from both the PBO and Minister Tassi, the lead for gender equity pay. The PBO felt that your government could have implemented pay equity sooner than your current pace, and the minister objected to that statement when questioned.

How can your government be trusted to stand up for women in any capacity when your colleagues and the PBO aren't even on the same page?

I would also do you the favour of reminding you that the Harper government has not been in power for over six years.

The Chair: Unfortunately, that's your time.

Now we're going to—

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, may I provide a quick response to that?

The Chair: Please provide a very brief response.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: The Conservative Party of Canada voted against our pay equity legislation.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll go to Mrs. Zahid for four minutes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for appearing before the committee today, and thank you for all the work that you are doing on behalf of all women. We really appreciate having your voice at the cabinet table.

The year 2020, the last 12 months, was difficult for all Canadians, for everyone across the world, but particularly for women. They have felt the impacts of COVID-19, and their lives have been affected adversely. They have been caregivers for their parents. They have been teachers for their children while trying to make ends meet.

Minister, can you please discuss the number of measures that our government has taken to support Canadians, especially women, through this health crisis as we work towards recovery? Particularly, can you discuss why the task force on women in the economy is such a crucial piece?

• (1155)

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you so much, MP Zahid, particularly for your leadership as chair of the immigration and citizenship committee. That work is so important to our government and to our

country's economic prosperity, and we appreciate having you at the table.

In terms of the measures that have been implemented, there are the CERB, the wage subsidy, the CEBA loans, the women entrepreneurship fund, the changes in EI that have actually brought the number of women receiving EI close to 50% for the first time ever, the GBV funds that we were discussing, the supports given to increase pay for those on the front lines of the fight against the pandemic, and vaccines. My goodness, there are four vaccines now, and those vaccines are going to help women who are caring for and afraid for their loved ones and help them to get back to work. That is in addition to the \$1.5 billion that Minister Qualtrough announced. The funds will go and already have gone to provinces and territories to support skills training for women in the hardest-hit sectors. Those are some of the measures that our government has put forward in addition to collecting disaggregated gender data. These are going to be important foundational pieces to get our economy back.

The women in the economy task force that Minister Freeland and Minister Fortier announced is made up of a group of women who bring a breadth of experiences to the decision-making table. Their voices are going to inform our government, particularly the ministers responsible in finance, to ensure that our recovery has the most practical and the most comprehensive understanding of how women are landing in the midst of the pandemic, but also how we get women back on their feet. How do we get women into those early learning and child care spaces? Women are needed there. Perhaps we can train the women who have been hit in the hospitality sector and lost their jobs to become ELCC workers. Beyond that, we need to get more women into STEM fields, in trades, in engineering, in math, and in science. Those fields are higher-wage fields, and they have significant labour shortages.

With all the ways that women have been hit hard by COVID, there are incredible opportunities ahead of us for women and for all Canadians. With a feminist government in charge that is listening to the voices of diverse women, women are going to be okay, but that requires all of us to work together and to, first and foremost, beat the virus and ensure that everyone who wants the vaccine gets it.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister, very much for appearing before our committee today.

There are several routine motions that we go through to approve the supplementary and main estimates, so I'll read those out now.

DEPARTMENT FOR WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Vote 5c—Grants and contributions.....\$8,700,000

(Vote 5c agreed to)

Shall I report the supplementary estimates (C) 2020-21 to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Next, on the main estimates, shall vote 1 in the amount of \$45,345,445 under the Department for Women and Gender Equality carry?

Ms. Jag Sahota: Can we have a recorded division on this, please?

The Chair: Yes, we may.

DEPARTMENT FOR WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$45,345,445

Vote 5—Grants and contributions.....\$75,544,022

(Vote 1 agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0)

(Vote 5 agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0)

Shall I report the main estimates 2021-22 to the House?

Ms. Sahota.

• (1200)

Ms. Jag Sahota: I'd like a recorded division, please.

The Chair: Absolutely.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0)

We are going into our committee portion of the meeting, so you'll have to log off this link and log into the in camera portion. I'll see you on the other side.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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