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Chair: Mrs. Karen Vecchio



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• (1315)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): Good afternoon. I call this meeting to order. Pursuant to the motion adopted on Tuesday, February 1, 2022, the committee will resume its study on the main estimates 2022-23.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to order of the House of Commons on November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. Per the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on March 10, 2022, all those attending the meeting in person must wear a mask except for members who are at their place during proceedings.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of witnesses and members. I'm sure looking at everybody on this. You probably already know about your microphone. Touch your microphone. If you're looking for French, English or the floor interpretation, you'll find it on the bottom.

I'm looking at Ken Hardie.

Welcome to our committee today, Niki. You're going to see a different way of how people chair their meetings. We're just going to try to get as much done as we can today.

We know that Minister Ien has a dead stop at three o'clock today, so we're going to be working toward those timelines. We'll be able to do votes after that, but we want to make sure that Minister Ien can be on her way.

We're going to break this into two parts. I would like to welcome our witnesses for our first hour of this panel.

We have the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations. Welcome to Minister Marc Miller.

We have the Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Youth. Welcome to Minister Marci Ien.

From the Department of Women and Gender Equality, we have Alia Butt, assistant deputy minister for strategic policy; Gina Wilson, deputy minister; and Lisa Smylie, director general, research results and delivery branch. From the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, we have Daniel Quan-Watson, deputy minister. Thank you very much for joining us today.

I'll be passing the floor over to the witnesses. Because of the time being very short, I will be cutting you off at five minutes, so when

you start to see the hammer, please make sure you wrap it up within the next 10 seconds, if you don't mind.

I'm going to take this opportunity now to pass it over to Minister Ien.

Minister Ien, you have five minutes.

[Translation]

Hon. Marci Ien (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth): Thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to participate in the committee's study of resource development and violence against indigenous women and girls.

[English]

I am speaking to you from my home in Toronto on the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat people.

I'd like to start by thanking this committee for undertaking this really important study as all forms of gender-based violence are violations of human rights. For decades, far too many indigenous women and girls, two-spirit and LGBTQ people across Canada have suffered in silence. Gender-based violence takes a physical, psychological, emotional and financial toll on victims, survivors and their families. It is simply unacceptable. This happens in our country.

Since the release of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls report and its recommendations, our government's understanding of the harmful social norms, structures and relationships that contribute to this issue has deepened. When we take a closer look at the available data, the picture is extremely grim. We know indigenous women are more likely than non-indigenous women to be sexually assaulted or experience intimate partner violence. There is mounting evidence of a correlation between resource development projects, and acts of physical and sexual violence against indigenous women and girls. This reality is unsustainable.

The reality is that many resource development projects in the forestry and mining industries happen on or adjacent to the traditional and, in many cases, unceded lands of indigenous peoples. We learned from the final MMIWG report that resource extraction sites bring with them transient and largely male workforces, and can result in increased rates of sexual offences, domestic violence and gang violence in host communities.

What cannot be ignored is the strong link between human trafficking and the disproportionately high rates of violence against indigenous women and girls. It tears too many families and communities apart and simply cannot continue.

These are not isolated issues that only happen in remote work environments. Evidence suggests that when women are subjected to unwanted sexual attention in public, they withdraw from their regular daily activities and stop going to school, attending classes or even going to work to make more money for themselves and their families. They stop doing these things.

Our government knows that the solution lies in actively educating, engaging and mobilizing everyone in Canada, including boys and men, in this effort. Targeted investment policies and programs that directly address GBV are at the core of this work. Last year, we invested \$601 million to advance the national action plan to end gender-based violence, and this year, through budget 2022, we've committed \$539.3 million to finalize this plan and support the provinces and territories as we begin to implement within a year.

Along with the provinces and territories, the plan is informed by engagement with civil society, indigenous partners, community leaders and more than a thousand recommendations from stakeholders. Our shared goal is to ensure everyone, regardless of where they live, has reliable and timely access to appropriate protection and services.

My department is a key partner in the federal pathway to address missing and murdered indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQ people, the federal government's contribution to the 2021 MMIWG national action plan. To ensure that these two initiatives complement each other, we will continue to work in partnership with indigenous communities, 2SLGBTQ people, leaders, survivors and their families, along with all governments.

We know that even with the best intentions, modern government policies and programs can also contribute to discrimination and inequity. One of the calls for justice requested that governments critically examine their prioritization and resourcing measures, and eliminate the marginalization of indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQ people in budgets, as well as programs, and that's exactly what we're doing.

The actions and investments that I've described today cannot on their own put an end to gender-based violence. We know that. However, they represent important pieces of the larger solution. By better understanding the links between resource development, social infrastructure and their relationship to vulnerable populations and GBV, I believe this study will be extremely helpful in informing the way forward.

- (1320)

It is critical that we inspire Canadians from all corners of our country to learn about and put in the work to actively prevent gender-based violence.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Minister Ien, next time, I'm going to ask you to put your mike up closer up to your nose.

I would like to note that Ms. Chantal Marin-Comeau, who is the director general of the missing and murdered women and girls secretariat, is also on the panel today. I just noticed her name as we were doing this.

I'm now going to pass the floor to the Hon. Marc Miller for five minutes.

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Kwe kwe.Tansi.Unnusakkut. Good afternoon.

I want to acknowledge first that I'm speaking to you on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

Before I begin, I want to take a moment of recognition for Rebecca Contois, a member of the Crane River First Nation, who was found brutally murdered in Winnipeg early this week. I want to acknowledge, personally and on behalf of Canada, the family's and the community's horrific loss.

I'm here to discuss this ongoing tragedy and ongoing crisis. Families and survivors must see tangible actions from all levels of government to end the systemic causes of violence against first nations, Inuit and Métis women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. This is collective work to end this national crisis. Our work centres around the implementation of the 231 calls for justice found in the final report of the National Inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

The national inquiry heard testimony from witnesses who explained how resource extraction projects can exacerbate violence against indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people as outlined by Minister Ien. It is connected to the environment and masculine work culture of these projects—from the transient nature of the workers, to the prevalence of harassment and assault in the workplace, as well as rotational shift work, mental health and substance use, and economic insecurity. It's a story we hear repeated across the country, including during the pandemic.

Our government is developing guidelines for resource extraction projects to decrease the risk for indigenous women staying and working in camps and living in impacted surrounding communities. For example, for the Trans Mountain expansion project, there's an indigenous advisory and monitoring committee. This committee has introduced guidelines that could be adapted for other projects. These include completing gender-based, socio-economic impact assessments; performing impact benefit agreements to include provisions on the impacts of projects and the safety and security of indigenous woman, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people; anticipating and recognizing increased demand on social infrastructure; and identifying mitigation measures as part of the planning and approval process.

Violence against indigenous women in the extraction sector in Canada is part of the larger problem of systemic violence rooted in colonialism and misogyny. The specific focus of this study connects to our broader work to end the violence against indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people across the country.

• (1325)

[*Translation*]

Budget 2022 builds on previous investments, including the \$2.2 billion commitment made by the government in budget 2021 to end the crisis. Budget 2022 also invests in housing, education, and mental wellness for indigenous communities, as well as in the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. All of these initiatives are linked to the Government of Canada's Federal Pathway commitments regarding missing and murdered indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people, as well as responding to calls for justice.

[*English*]

Our government recognizes that access to culture remains an important part of reclaiming power and place, and ultimately of finding safety for indigenous peoples.

I recently had the opportunity to announce several investments that respond directly, as a beginning, to call to justice 2.3, on providing safe cultural spaces in indigenous communities across the country. In one project out west, in Skeetchestn Indian Band, we're allocating more than \$800,000 in funding for a healing through culture project, which includes the construction of a traditional pit home and a museum for the community.

When we visited this last April, the energy and excitement of their youth and the entire class for this project was contagious. The new centre will provide a space for the next generation to remain connected to their language and connected to their culture.

[*Translation*]

This program is an example of the work our government has started, but it is clear that much remains to be done. The Government of Canada will provide an update in June, very soon, on the progress to date and highlight the shortcomings, which will help us chart a path forward.

We have heard it, we understand it, and we agree that there is a need for a strong oversight and accountability mechanism, such as a mediator.

[*English*]

This is a whole-of-government, whole-of-Canada and whole-of-society approach. Our actions must be done in partnership, developed collaboratively, implemented systemically and led by indigenous women with input from indigenous communities.

We have more work to do and will continue to do this tirelessly with indigenous partners, provinces and territories.

Meegwetch. Qujannamiik. Marsee. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Miller.

We'll start off with our first round of questioning. We'll be providing each party six minutes to start. We'll be starting online with Dominique Vien.

Could everybody make sure their microphones aren't popping today? Keep them nice and close to the nose. Thanks.

Go ahead, Dominique. You have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the two ministers for meeting with us this afternoon.

We have undertaken a very serious study, for which we are all engaged. Some of the testimony we've heard so far has been chilling. I listened to the presentations by both ministers. They were very interesting. Obviously, no one likes to hear what we have heard, and no one likes to see certain absolutely dramatic situations happen.

What do you know about violence against women in places where there is resource development or extraction? What kind of data do you currently have to judge the situation? Would you say today that there is indeed violence in those areas?

• (1330)

[*English*]

The Chair: Do you want the question directed to Ms. Ien?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: My question is for Mr. Miller.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Miller.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marc Miller: Thank you for the very relevant question. The answer is yes.

As you mentioned, the reality is that there is a lack of data to really measure the full extent and state of things. The government has a number of initiatives to collect data. You've probably heard about them. It's impossible to address the problem and fix it in a meaningful way without data to back it up.

Having said that, I've heard too much testimony, either personally or in the drafting of the report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls to say that these are just anecdotes. That's far from being the case. There is evidence of systemic violence, for all the reasons I mentioned in my opening remarks, and much more.

So in reality, it's measurable. It is a problem and it needs to be addressed.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Mr. Miller, people have told us that there wasn't enough consultation. Women and indigenous communities aren't consulted before the various projects that are planned for development. No measures are taken upstream, before all this takes place.

Do you agree with that statement?

Hon. Marc Miller: Yes, absolutely.

In terms of the consultation process, we can't excuse this as an evolving area of the law. In Canada, we ourselves have made mistakes in upstream consultation processes.

The consultation process is the responsibility of both the provinces and territories, of Canada as a whole, and of the companies. It is an engagement process that should not be superficial. It needs to be deepened by women's suggestions and comments. What we know is that their voices aren't being heard. When voices are allowed to be heard, we're not talking about the form, but the substance, about improving the project and the working conditions that should exist on the site itself.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Mr. Minister, it seems to me that it would be so easy, if I can put it that way, to act fairly quickly and to mobilize all the players involved in this problem—the companies that set up shop there, first of all, but also the police, indigenous communities and governments, including the federal government.

Why is it so difficult to get everyone at the table? It seems to me that we have to show some leadership. Everyone has to sit down around the table and assess the situation.

How is it that women who go to work in these companies have second-class jobs? It seems that no one is focusing on the same problem at the same time. It seems to me that it wouldn't be complicated to sit down with everyone at the same table to determine how things are going to go and to specify what we no longer want or want to see.

Hon. Marc Miller: The observation I've made is that there are a lot of people who don't want to hear the truth. Perhaps it's a human reaction, but it isn't right—

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Who doesn't want to hear the truth, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Marc Miller: This may include stakeholders involved in the consultation process, the provinces and territories, and sometimes the Government of Canada. That was the significance of the conclusion of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, after all the testimony. The report's 231 recommendations demonstrate the impact it had.

We know it's not an easy thing to sit everyone at the same table. We need to determine who will be involved in this, as well as when, how and under what conditions. The federal government can certainly impose certain conditions, but companies, the provinces and territories must be involved. You've been in politics long enough to know that it is not always easy to do these things when it comes to an issue as serious as this one, which has major economic implications. That's why we're sitting here today.

The fact remains that improvements have been made in recent years. Companies are starting to follow suit and see the problem. They have told me so in person. Nevertheless, the problem and the crisis still exist today.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Time is short, so I'll move on to my next question. It's a bit frustrating not having much time.

Call for justice 13.5 calls for ensuring that when a project is developed in the communities, social infrastructures, such as policing and health services, are planned for accordingly.

Where are we on that?

• (1335)

Hon. Marc Miller: We are working on a number of fronts, and I hope to be able to present an update in a few weeks, that is to say on June 3 or 4. You will then be able to find out our response to the calls to justice after the first anniversary of the publication of the report.

[*English*]

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

I will have to—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: So we'll have to invite you back, Mr. Minister.

[*English*]

The Chair: Perfect. We will keep on inviting him. That's not a problem. Thank you very much.

I'm now going to pass it over to Anita Vandenberg.

Anita, you have six minutes.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thank you, Minister, for being here today, and also thank you for your demonstrated commitment in your portfolio to listening to and working with indigenous women, as we've seen you do.

We've heard in this study—and I want to thank you for being here as part of this very important study—from women, not just about the impact of the resource extraction industries in their communities, but also the women who seek leadership positions within the industry, on the bullying, discrimination, racism and harassment that they feel, and how often they feel relegated to tokenism, as opposed to having a meaningful space at the table to make change from within.

I am wondering if you can talk a little about what we are doing to make sure women are fully part of the process, that there is an inclusive industry and, whether it's the board or high-level executive positions within companies, that indigenous women are there, they are present and they are also making a difference within those companies.

Hon. Marc Miller: Thanks for the question.

Perhaps Minister Ien would like to complete my thoughts. As this committee has seen, the jobs that are held by women are often inferior in nature in terms of how they're paid and, in addition, the treatment they receive. That is something that consistently gets underlined to industry, as well as the processes of consultation that are part of the process when these larger, more often than not, projects are proposed in communities.

In order to complete my thoughts, though, I will allow Minister Ien to speak on that.

Hon. Marci Ien: Thank you so much, Minister Miller.

I want to point out here that this is an all-of-government, all-hands-on-deck situation.

What that means is that my colleagues and I in cabinet often discuss areas where our mandates overlap. That happens a lot. As such, WAGE and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada are working really hard together to ensure the GBV national action plan and the 2021 missing and murdered indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people national action plan are aligned, and in fact complementary, because that's important.

Our collective goal is for anyone facing gender-based violence to have access to reliable and timely protection and services—that is really important too—and this most definitely includes indigenous women, girls, two-spirit, LGBTQIA+ people, and those living, I might add, in northern rural and remote communities, where a lot of this development takes place.

Thank you so much, Madam Chair and Minister.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you.

Further to that, talking about the economic development opportunities for indigenous women and for the communities in which the resource extraction is taking place, often what we have heard is that this cannot be top down. This cannot be government-directed. It needs to be self-directed by the communities, and particularly by marginalized members of those communities, making sure that they are also included, not just as beneficiaries of programming but as part of the design, the implementation and the nature of the programming that takes place.

Minister Miller, could you tell us a bit about what we are doing to ensure that these economic opportunities are being self-directed?

Hon. Marc Miller: That's the evolution of the consultation and the impact benefit agreements that have evolved. It's not there yet, but it's starting to look like something where communities are actually involved in the process, involved in free, prior and informed consent, and avoiding what's often been used, which is the instrumentalization of indigenous peoples. When you start doing that, the first people who pay for it are obviously indigenous peoples, but those who are most vulnerable within indigenous communities are indigenous women and girls. We've seen that in the past.

It's also making sure that this is the condition to getting proper societal approval for a particular project. What companies are now realizing is that, when that work is done properly, the actual outcomes are better for the surrounding communities, better for their companies and not a cost of doing business, which was the thinking before this way.

Again, we're not there yet, and we're not in a utopian world either. That's what companies are starting to see and starting to do in Canada, and we need to keep pushing them to do that.

• (1340)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you, Minister.

I think it's very important to hear from you the recognition that we're not there yet and that we're working with communities to make sure that we go forward in a good way. I appreciate that you understand that.

I think I have just less than a minute.

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Maybe Minister Ien would want to respond to that question as well in 30 seconds.

Hon. Marci Ien: Thank you so much, Anita.

I just want to point to the fact that our government is not working in silos here with regard to this. It is very much being informed by organizations on the ground, deeply informed.

I will quickly point out that Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, which addresses Inuit women's economic security and prosperity, is doing a project right now. It's a three-year project, and it is being addressed and led by Inuit women. It deals with economic security and prosperity in the resource extraction industry. This is how we stay informed.

Thank you so much, Anita and Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Thanks for watching my signal, Minister. I really do appreciate it.

I'm now going to pass six minutes over to Andréanne Larouche.

Andréanne, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd like to thank both ministers for being with us today. I will address Mr. Miller first.

We know that there are still unacceptable human rights violations in the context of resource development. We hear this when our colleagues ask questions, and you yourself have confirmed this. As you said, this is certainly not in keeping with the very goals of reconciliation that the federal government is promoting and that it must achieve.

We have before us an important report that, as early as 2019, highlighted this and other issues. I would say that the focus of this committee's current study is directly related to calls for justice 13.4 and 13.5 of the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. It contains important recommendations that the federal government must respond to.

Why does the problem of violence in the context of resource development persist, even though it was reported as early as 2015 as part of the national inquiry? Why has your government been slow to act? It has been known since 2015. What have been the obstacles to implementing the recommendations?

Hon. Marc Miller: To be very specific, the national inquiry began in 2015, and the report was published in 2019.

I would also like to clarify that the federal government is indeed the main player in this debate, but not the only one. This is a societal project and, as the final report pointed out, it involves the provinces and territories. Forced sterilization and birth alerts still exist, particularly in my beautiful province of Quebec, and that is unacceptable. That said, we are talking about a societal project.

The reality is that these problems have persisted for too long and are still present today. I don't want to make excuses, but there was a pandemic that lasted for two years and made women and children more vulnerable.

Given all of our investments in different budgets, it can hardly be said that nothing has been done, quite the contrary. I can tell you about our investments in shelters and other forms of housing in Pauktuutit, in the Far North, or even our investments in my province of Quebec.

This is something that needs to happen, and it's very frustrating to hear that it's going to take time. However, what the report told us is that we must not take a cookie-cutter approach, but rather a systemic approach, and the results will follow.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: On the implementation of calls for justice 13.4 and 13.5 on resource extraction and violence against women, you're talking about investments that have been made for shelters. So what progress do you think has been made?

Hon. Marc Miller: What is well known is that this report has forced awareness and deepened the issue in society. Governments, let alone companies, must be held accountable for some of the situations that persist. There are also a number of programs to fight violence, of which Ms. Ien is obviously responsible. The fact remains that this is an awareness-raising process that must take place over several years.

I hope to be able to report more fully in two weeks, as I was saying to one of your colleagues. It's not going to be a glowing report, obviously, given the state of the situation in Canada and the tragedies that continue, but we're not going to give up. We have invested \$2.2 billion in 46 programs that are starting to roll out. That said, once again, I want to be clear: the results are slow.

• (1345)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Miller, you touched on the issue of companies. Often when it comes to resource development

projects in Canada, companies and industries have a duty to put in place internal and external measures to prevent acts of violence.

Do you think the adoption of a federal policy regulating and regulating these companies in terms of ethics and harassment could curb this violence?

I invite Ms. Ien or Mr. Miller to answer the question.

Hon. Marci Ien: Thank you very much for the question, Ms. Larouche.

[English]

If I may, I would like to respond to a couple of things.

The first, as we know, and as Minister Miller has said, is that violence against and the disappearance and murder of indigenous women, girls and 2-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual people—2SLGBTQIA+ people—in Canada is an ongoing national tragedy, but I want to point to a couple of things here.

In our department, since 2015, 31% of all WAGE funding has been specifically for indigenous people. In budget 2021, \$55 million was provided to bolster the capacity of indigenous women and 2SLGBTQIA+ organizations to provide gender-based violence prevention and real programming to try to prevent this kind of violence. In January 2022, just a couple of months ago—six months, to be exact—WAGE launched a call for proposals and those applications are currently being assessed.

These are ways in which we are working with the organizations and people on the ground who serve indigenous communities, working together, as we should and as Minister Miller pointed out, to come to solutions.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're now going to turn it over for the next six minutes to Niki Ashton.

Niki, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question would be for Minister Miller.

How have your ministry and the Government of Canada gone about implementing the calls for justice in the inquiry and specifically how much money is being invested in terms of addressing violence against women in the context of implementing the calls for justice?

Hon. Marc Miller: Thanks for the question.

Crown-Indigenous Relations has a leadership role in coordinating all whole-of-government federal approaches as well as convening our provincial and territorial partners. The ones that Crown-Indigenous Relations is specifically responsible for are only a snapshot of the role we play in coordinating that across government.

As I've noted—and this is not an exclusive number—there was in a prior budget \$2.2 billion specifically addressed to 46 organizations to deal with the response to the final report. That's only part of the puzzle, including the housing and infrastructure initiatives that we've put forward in budget 2021 and 2022, as well as all the work that Minister Ien is doing and also Minister Lametti on the calls for justice that deal with justice specifically, and Minister Mendicino and others across the government.

That's the best answer I have for that particular question, because it's something we can develop on at length in terms of the response and how it's coordinated and sometimes uncoordinated. I think the report that I'll have in two weeks will highlight where we see some success, but also where we see some challenges and failures.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Okay.

Speaking of challenges and failures, the AFN commented on budget 2022 that many of the priorities identified in their pre-budget submissions, including implementation of calls for justice, saw no new investments in this budget. Why were these priorities, as expressed by the AFN, for example, not included in the budget?

• (1350)

Hon. Marc Miller: With great respect, the work that the AFN has done has actually influenced and really changed the course of history in terms of the budgeting cycles and the investments that we've put in the last two budgets in particular, and ever since we've been in government.

I do take exception to characterizing the investments in budget 2022 as not dealing with MMIWG. You can't talk about housing insecurity without talking about houses and building houses. The work that Minister Ien is doing in the gender-based violence initiatives speaks directly to MMIWG. I do think the language that we use in the budget is important, and I find it lacking in how it addresses specifically the calls for justice, but that's something that is on us. It doesn't mean that the investments don't deal with it. In fact, it's quite the contrary.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Let's talk about housing for a moment. As you know, I represent one of the most marginalized parts of the country, and the housing crisis is extreme in many of the first nations I represent, and it is not by accident. It is an absolute result of Liberal and Conservative governments underfunding housing on first nations.

I know this committee has heard from MKO and Grand Chief Settee around the lack of housing on reserve as well as off reserve, and we know that, as you point out, Minister, this contributes to the vulnerability of indigenous women and two-spirit people in our communities.

This budget is nowhere near where it needs to be to address the housing crisis in terms of indigenous communities. How is your government not realizing the urgency with which massive investments in housing need to be made on and off reserve?

Hon. Marc Miller: As you properly characterized, MP Ashton, the housing crisis will not be resolved through any one particular budgetary cycle. It has to be addressed in a systemic fashion with sustained investments over the course of many budgets.

The amounts we put in budget 2022 are historic in nature in their sums. The challenge now is to get them out and to get the houses built. They will change lives. They will make a difference as well as the amounts we put in prior budgets for shelter specifically on the points that we are dealing with today. They will be game-changers in many ways, but are they enough? Absolutely not. I don't think anyone credible could stand up and say that. It will require sustained effort by every single government that purports to represent Canada for a number of years, well up to 2030, on closing the actual gap.

We have to continue measuring it as well, and that's a challenge that my colleague Minister Hajdu has the responsibility for and that we're working on to get a sense of where that infrastructure gap is and how much it is. We have, unfortunately, the bad habit of throwing numbers at each other of various levels of sophistication, and that doesn't help to do the financing profiling work that we need to do to make sure communities are properly served and are getting the housing and supports they are entitled to.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Agreed. However, of course, we also know that Indigenous Services Canada has been clear around the basic gap around housing that exists in communities.

Just quickly, Madam Chair, how long do I have?

The Chair: You have 40 seconds.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I'll finish off by saying that what's critical here is for there to be a sustained commitment on MMIWG, particularly the calls for justice. It is not acceptable that in this budget there isn't a clear commitment on this front or on the housing crisis. We need bold action now and we've yet to see that, as many indigenous leaders and people here in our region are stating clearly.

I'll end off with that. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to our second round. We will be doing five minutes for the CPC and the Liberals, and two and a half minutes for the NDP and Bloc.

We'll be turning the floor over now to Shelby Kramp-Neuman.

Shelby, you have five minutes.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to both ministers for being available on a Friday afternoon.

I'll start my initial line of questioning for Minister Miller, the first question being a simple yes-or-no answer.

Do you agree with me that, in order to achieve our truth and reconciliation goals, we should be involving all indigenous voices at the table?

Hon. Marc Miller: I believe so, yes.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: I happen to agree with you.

Despite multiple requests to the government to join the national action plan, the coalition on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls in B.C., the Ontario Native Women's Association and the Quebec Native Women, unfortunately, were all excluded.

Would you also agree with me that investments in truth and reconciliation should be tailored to the specific requests from indigenous communities and also detailed extensively in order to achieve transparency in that particular process?

• (1355)

Hon. Marc Miller: I'd say yes. I don't think these organizations were excluded. They certainly weren't. They weren't supportive of the federal pathway ultimately. It would be wrong for us to expect unanimity, but it would be equally wrong for us to exclude them.

They weren't excluded, but there certainly wasn't unanimity, despite the input that we had from hundreds of survivors, families and organizations to the federal pathway. It is important for the record to show that.

I obviously don't tell you how to ask your questions, so please, I hope you don't object to the form in which I answer them. Sometimes a yes-or-no answer isn't applicable.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: That's fair enough. I respect that.

In the budget, there were only a few short lines on tackling gender-based violence, putting forward a national action plan and the pledge of over \$500 million over five years. There was no mention of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.

How will the government take it upon itself to readily define its investments in truth and reconciliation and make a genuine effort to include all indigenous voices at the table?

Hon. Marc Miller: I'd like Minister Ien to answer part of that question, but the federal pathway gives a clear way forward for the federal government's leadership role in answering those calls. There are short-term targets the first, second and third years. I'll be giving an update in about two weeks on that specifically. It will be a continued ongoing process, especially the issue of accountability, which is still a matter that we need to resolve because it can't be up to the Government of Canada to give itself grades on this particular issue.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

Minister Ien, would you like to add to that?

Hon. Marci Ien: I certainly would.

Shelby, thank you so much for the question.

As I stated before, this is an all-of-government approach. I work very closely, as our department and ministry do, with Minister Miller, Minister Hajdu and others. The national action plan aligns with and complements the national action plan for missing and murdered indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people and the federal pathway to address missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. As you rightly pointed out, budget 2022 supports this with \$539 million.

I just want to reiterate that this is an all-of-government approach. We are working together on this, and \$539 million is what we were supported with in budget 2022. We will continue to work towards all that indigenous women and girls and others across this country need.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Excellent. Thank you.

Do I have about a minute left?

The Chair: You have a minute and 20 seconds.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Terrific.

With regard to quantitative data, Melissa Aalhus from the Northern Health authority was regularly cited in the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls report with regard to sexual health impacts. She is cited in the report as suggesting that there is an "abundance of anecdotal evidence". However, it was noted that there is a need for additional quantitative data to be collected.

Have there been efforts with Statistics Canada to ensure that the government is working to obtain additional quantitative data to properly address the topic of resource development and the violence against indigenous women and girls?

Hon. Marci Ien: Shelby—

Hon. Marc Miller: The issue—

Hon. Marci Ien: I'm sorry. Go ahead, Minister Miller.

Hon. Marc Miller: The issue of data comes up often and it's the basic premise that you can't mend what you can't measure.

The anecdotal evidence is so overwhelming for us not to draw the conclusions that we're drawing. They're not great conclusions, but the government in the past budgetary cycles has put millions of dollars into supporting grassroots organizations and coordinating data. Again, it is work that's ongoing but needs to continue, especially led by indigenous voices.

Marci had some elements to add as well.

Hon. Marci Ien: I did. Thank you—

The Chair: Actually, Minister Ien, I'm going to ask you to save those comments for next time because I'm going to switch over to the next questioner.

I'll pass it over now to Ken Hardie.

Ken, you have five minutes.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's delightful to be with the group and to see you in the chair today.

Minister Miller, you may remember this. A couple of years ago, somebody—and I believe it was the Prime Minister, actually—made some comments about the issue of resource projects and the negative impact on indigenous communities, particularly on first nations women and girls. At the time, there was a suggestion that this was somehow an attack on the resource sector, and I think oil and gas was pointed out. That's really not the case, especially with the fact that the committee is undertaking this study.

● (1400)

Hon. Marc Miller: No, absolutely not, but we can't be blind to the fact that the extraction industry is where a good chunk of this is occurring. It has been pointed out time and time again during the pandemic, when we were negotiating a very difficult situation, that communities were shutting down and not allowing workers to get through and work at Keeyask.

A number of witnesses stood forward on a number of our calls with the MKO grand chief and testified to the fact that they were worried about their safety. The uninitiated would ask, "What does that have to do with physical safety?" One of the witnesses spoke about being raped not once but twice by workers, and this was obviously fuelling the need not only to shut down communities and enforce security with respect to a worldwide pandemic, but also to ensure the safety of women.

These are real events. There are too many of them to discount them at all. We should be listening to people and that should inform our thinking in this. It happens consistently, time and time again, so this isn't an attack on any particular industry. It's the reality of how a number of industries have been operated. A large number of them are realizing this and realizing that, in order to move forward, they need to shape up, and I think that's the value of this study in all its nuance.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I would also submit that in fact this issue has been around, regrettably, for a very long time. Everything from cattle drives in the Old West to wartime have all featured these abuses of indigenous women and girls. In fact, it's even in the broader community.

I'm not sure if you or Minister Ien would take this question. We've heard the need for more resources—namely, money—from the federal government to support communities. Is there a sense as to what good this money would do and what it would be used for that would improve the situation?

Minister Ien, would you care to comment on that?

Hon. Marci Ien: Thank you so much, Ken, for the question.

It is very important to understand the numbers and understand the disaggregated data. Budget 2021 put in \$11 million specifically for research, knowledge and mobilization.

At this point, I'd like to just bring in Lisa Smylie, if I might. I call her our "research guru", because she is the keeper of the numbers and facts so that we can break this down for you, Ken.

Dr. Lisa Smylie (Director General, Research, Results and Delivery Branch, Department for Women and Gender Equality): Thanks, Minister.

As the minister pointed out, there is \$11 million in research and knowledge mobilization. We acknowledge that there isn't national data with respect to the impacts of resource extraction on indigenous women and girls and violence, and we need to fix that. Part of our funding is going to projects and research, community-based projects, so that we can better understand the impacts of this issue on indigenous women and girls, and with that knowledge, we can work to address it.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you for that.

Perhaps I'll go back to Minister Miller. I would assume that resource companies in mining, forestry, oil and gas, etc., are also sensitive to the impact of their activities on indigenous communities. Have you had any sense that there's a coming together of these companies in the standards they want to apply to their workforce in terms of support for communities as they move in to do their work in a certain location?

Hon. Marc Miller: I wouldn't say that it is consistent and unanimous. There's a sharing of best practices. Certainly, some of the work that Trans Mountain is doing, although far from perfect, is indicative of some of the change that we've seen over the last few years.

There are other companies that are really leading the way, but there are others that are not there yet, and those are the ones that are falling behind. I think you either get on this or there will be an impact on the particular company in question.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Miller.

We're now going to turn it over for two and a half minutes to Andr anne Larouche.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

In your remarks, Mr. Miller, you talked about cultural centres. As part of our study on resource development and violence against indigenous women and girls, where might these centres fit in?

● (1405)

Hon. Marc Miller: Could you repeat the question?

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: You talked about the cultural centres you want to put in place. You mentioned something about—

Hon. Marc Miller: I talked about women's shelters, whether it's on the reserves in the Far North or in urban centres. This is one of our major initiatives announced in previous budgets. This investment of several hundred million dollars includes the four shelters in the Far North under the Pauktuutit initiative, where there is a great need for off-reserve shelters and housing for women. With respect to on-reserve shelters, I have announced a handful. It is important to note that these announcements are made at the will of the communities. We only announce the construction of these centres if the communities agree, because there is a need for anonymity, for reasons that you are very familiar with.

The announcement I was referring to was made about a year ago and involved the construction of several dozen shelters across the country, at an estimated cost of \$700 million, in direct response to the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: I have less than a minute left to finish asking my questions.

Resource development projects are often located in remote and isolated communities. As a result, our study focuses primarily on remote communities. In order for us to further consider the isolation factor in our study, could you give us some concrete examples of what your government could do to address this very real concern?

Hon. Marc Miller: These communities aren't necessarily remote, but they are remote in that they aren't very close to major urban centres.

The answer and the thought I have on this is that solutions need to be tailored and developed in concert with the communities in question, especially the indigenous communities. That is obvious. Companies are starting to realize that. If we ask for shelters and housing, for example, it's difficult to enter a community and say that the government's initiative was announced 200 kilometres away. So we need answers that are directed at the communities themselves. As we know, the more remote a community is, the greater the socio-economic gap.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister Miller.

We're now going to turn it over to Niki Ashton, online, for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is to both ministers.

Here we are talking about violence against indigenous women and indigenous communities. We know that climate change is currently having a disproportionate and devastating impact on a number of indigenous communities, and that impact is felt most strongly by women as well across the board.

With that reality in mind, I have put forward a private member's Bill C-245, seconded by my colleague, Leah Gazan, that shifts the foundations of the Canada Infrastructure Bank to focus on the desperate need for mitigation and adaptation infrastructure with a particular focus on indigenous and northern communities to deal with everything from devastating flooding and forest fires to melting ice

roads. The reality of the climate emergency is already with us, and we need solution-based ways of dealing with this crisis.

My question to both of you is this. Given your responsibilities as ministers and your interest, both in terms of gender equality and putting an end to violence against women and lifting up indigenous communities, will you be supporting my Bill C-245?

Hon. Marc Miller: It isn't sufficient, in my mind, to say that climate change, forest fires and flooding have an impact on indigenous communities.

I think it's important to say that the reason that is the case is that, in a lot of situations, we actually move those communities into areas where they're more vulnerable. The responsibility is on Canada to be sensitive to that fact, to pay compensation where appropriate and to move to the heart of the issue that you're addressing, MP Ashton, in being proactive in ensuring those communities have the support where they can. There's a responsibility that goes over and beyond the statistical reality that X-community is x-times more vulnerable than non-indigenous communities. We are, in part, the cause of it. That's important to realize.

I haven't looked at your bill in full yet and in order to give it a proper response, I would have to review it, but I look forward to doing so.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I appreciate that, and I was going to say that I'm sure Peguis First Nation very much appreciates the point around the forced relocation that they experienced.

Minister Ien, go ahead please.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Hon. Marci Ien: Thank you so much, Niki. Thank you for the question.

I will say, I have not reviewed the bill. I very much look forward to reviewing the bill, as we see who has been disproportionately impacted, especially in a pandemic lens.

• (1410)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Thank you, Minister Ien.

We're going to finally wrap it up. We have the last the few questions.

Dominique Vien, I'll pass the floor over to you for five minutes, and then we'll be going over to Francis for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Miller, I would like to talk to you.

According to the testimony we have heard and the discussions we have had with groups that came to testify, there appears to be a lack of quantitative data on the situation experienced or observed mostly by women. Women note a correlation between mining projects or resource extraction or development projects and violence against women. They also note that much is left unsaid. You will agree with me that women don't always report the violence they experience. That is another part of the problem. It affects economically vulnerable women, who are stuck in violent environments or in violent situations. So it is a vicious cycle.

There are discussions on projects in remote regions, regions that are not close to urban centres, as you said earlier. But there is currently a labour shortage, so men from out of town often move there to work for those companies and make a lot of money. One of my concerns is that those circumstances do not encourage companies to act quickly for things to change, to denounce situations, even implement a business policy to fire people whose behaviour is inappropriate or who have been violent toward indigenous women.

Is your interpretation the same as mine? Are you concerned that the current labour shortage may make some companies reluctant to let employees go even if their behaviour is downright inappropriate?

Hon. Marc Miller: That is indeed a risk. It's something that bothers me, but it may be based on reality. If I was a CEO, keeping people who behave like that would be a major risk for me. Nevertheless, the risk is there.

You mentioned at the outset how important it is to be able to gauge the extent of the situation. I wanted to highlight that because much has been done about it. Previous budgets dedicated \$24.5 million to a project on indigenous data. That initiative will continue, so that we could measure the problem in its entirety. I wanted to specify this because I was not clear when I spoke earlier.

[English]

Marci, I don't know if you wanted to add to that.

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: If I may, Mr. Miller, before I yield the floor to the minister, I would like to put another question to you.

Earlier, you said a few times that you would be receiving data, a study or a report on the situation around June 3 or 4. Could you remind me what exactly you are expecting as a report?

Hon. Marc Miller: I am not expecting to receive a report; it will come from my team and me. It will be an overview to determine what has been happening since the first anniversary of the federal report's publishing.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Will you make that public, Mr. Miller?

Hon. Marc Miller: We will hold a press conference, so yes, it will be public.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Okay.

Madam Chair, I think it would be a good idea to plan to hear from the minister again, so that he could share with us the result of the data and information he will have.

Minister, I apologize for not letting you answer right away, but I just didn't want to forget my idea.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: You have a minute left. Do you want me to pass it over to Minister Ien for a response?

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Perhaps the minister had something to add.

The Chair: Yes.

[English]

Go ahead, Minister Ien.

[Translation]

Hon. Marci Ien: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mrs. Vien.

[English]

I just wanted to say that under the federal GBV strategy—this is something we've reiterated many times—the key priority is to increase support for our most vulnerable populations. That, of course, includes indigenous peoples at the top of the list.

Madam Chair, I want Lisa to expand on this for a couple of seconds, if she can.

• (1415)

The Chair: Lisa, we'll give you 13 seconds.

Hon. Marci Ien: Thank you so much. We can do something with 13 seconds.

Go ahead, Lisa.

Dr. Lisa Smylie: Thank you.

To go back to the issue of research, while we don't have nationally representative statistics, there is a growing body of research on the impacts of the resource extraction industry on indigenous women and girls. The member has pointed to some of those. We need to look at—

The Chair: If you don't mind, Lisa, just because we are so tight on time, I will pass it over to Francis, our next questioner. Perhaps he can work that in with some of his questions.

Francis, I'll give you the last five minutes. Perhaps you can work with Lisa in making sure we get that answered.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Would Lisa like to take some of my time to complete her answer?

Dr. Lisa Smylie: That is very kind. Thank you.

I was just going to say that if we take a look at the impacts that the member has mentioned in terms of mental health and sexual health, and the impacts of sexual violence on indigenous women and girls in the resource extraction industry, it all comes down to culture.

We have some data in terms of giving us a sense of what that culture is. In fact, from some of the studies of indigenous and racialized women in mining camps, three-quarters of the women working in these industries have experienced discrimination: gender-based discrimination and discrimination based on indigeneity or sexual orientation.

Therefore, culture, shifting culture, needs to be at the heart of the response.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Thank you.

It's a pleasure to be here today. I find this discussion extremely interesting. I'm substituting for another member, so if I ask a question that is repetitive, please forgive me.

Minister Miller, my first question may be difficult to answer. It's a bit tangential, but I'll give it a go. I remember at the time of the Impact Assessment Agency law, the law for the first time specified that impact assessments must consider social impacts, not just economic and environmental impacts. There was criticism of that, because many said you should focus on narrow environmental issues and economic issues. I believe impact assessments now need to focus on the social impacts of resource projects.

My question to you is this. Have you seen evidence that this new factor that must be taken into account is filtering into the changes that are required to keep people safe in these resource communities? In other words, on some of the measures that you're talking about today, would these measures have occurred independently of the Impact Assessment Agency, or are some of them a response to the impact of the environmental assessment process?

Again, it's a bit of a tangential question. There may not be a clear answer, in which case I'll go to my next question.

Hon. Marc Miller: I'd say it's a little bit of both. The reality, unless someone corrects me, is that the extraction industry is one of the largest, if not the largest, employers of indigenous peoples in this country, but it's been done in a way that has been, in a sense, good for economic development in communities but also opportunistic in some senses. The full impact of that on communities, as was described in the final report on missing and murdered indigenous women, is that it has required regulatory ways of reshaping things but also culture shifts, which governments are singularly bad at doing themselves. It requires society to get involved. It requires companies and private industry to buy into it. That is a process that has naturally been slower.

I believe that these outcomes and changes need a little bit of pushing and prodding, a bit of carrot and a bit of stick. That is, I think, the reality of human nature.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: The new environmental impact assessment law may be having a positive impact, but at the same time, on another track, things are developing in that positive direction.

Hon. Marc Miller: We used to flood communities without thinking about them. Historically, there is a large stain that exists on these large projects, however favourably we envision them as a matter of economic development or whatever they have done for our country, but they have sometimes been on the backs of indigenous peoples. This is just a particular iteration of it and how it's impacted the most vulnerable.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: My next question is in regard to human trafficking. You mentioned human trafficking—or someone mentioned human trafficking—in some of these resource communities.

I understand the dynamics of violence in a heavily male community with a male ethic, colonial attitudes and substance abuse. I understand how that comes about, but when we talk about human trafficking, I think it's something more systematic and premeditated.

Are there networks that infiltrate these communities and prey on them, that somehow infiltrate them to conduct human trafficking as opposed to the more spontaneous violence that occurs in a male-dominated community with substance abuse and certain attitudes? Are networks targeting these resource communities for the purpose of human trafficking?

• (1420)

Hon. Marc Miller: Absolutely.

The Chair: We are out of time now, but this is such an important matter for all that I'm going to provide 30 seconds to both Ms. Ien and Mr. Miller.

Marc, you can take it over for the next 30 seconds and then pass it over to Marci.

Hon. Marc Miller: Thank you, Madam Chair

The clear answer is yes, but not only in extraction industries. During the wildfires and during some of the flooding evacuations, where there was a flooding and communities were evacuated to Winnipeg, there was sex trafficking. We had to fund a number of communities to go and provide perimeter security in Winnipeg to keep pimps from going in and exploiting the vulnerable. It happened as well as in Cornwall, when we evacuated a community into Cornwall.

The risk of transborder sex trafficking is real and present. They focus right in and exploit what they usually do, which is the vulnerable. That is everywhere, and we can't be blind to it.

The Chair: Minister Ien, do want a last word on this?

Hon. Marci Ien: Madam Chair, thank you so much.

I would just point out that the national strategy to combat human trafficking is led by Public Safety Canada. It brings together all our federal efforts under one strategic framework. It's supported by an investment of more than \$57 million over five years and \$10.28 million ongoing.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We will now wrap up our first panel for today.

On behalf of the committee, I would really like to thank Minister Miller and his department for being here and providing testimony today.

We're going to suspend for about 30 seconds. We have another person to put online, and we'll say goodbye to those who don't need to be with us for the second panel. We'll suspend for 30 seconds and come right back.

• (1420)

(Pause)

• (1420)

The Chair: Thank you very much. We will reconvene. This is our second panel, and we will be focusing on the main estimates.

Pursuant to the order of reference on Wednesday, March 2, 2022, the committee will begin its study on the main estimates for 2022-23.

I welcome our witnesses. We have Minister Ien, who is continuing on with this panel today. Thank you very much, Minister Ien.

From the Department for Women and Gender Equality, we have Alia Butt, assistant deputy minister, strategic policy; Gina Wilson, deputy minister; Gail Mitchell, assistant deputy minister, departmental programs and operations; and Lisa Smylie, director general, research, results and delivery branch.

I will provide five minutes to the minister to provide her opening statement. Then we will go into the round of questions.

Minister Ien, you have five minutes. Your time starts now.

• (1425)

Hon. Marci Ien: Hello again, Madam Chair and honourable members.

I'd like to acknowledge that I'm speaking to you from my home in Toronto on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the New Credit, the Anishinabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat people.

I am happy to be with you here today to highlight my department's priorities, planned results and associated resource requirements for the upcoming fiscal year. My department will be receiving \$310.3 million via the main estimates with \$245.2 million in grants and contributions to support our continuing work.

As Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, I regularly meet with and learn from extraordinary people and organizations committed to building a stronger and more prosperous Canada. With my provincial and territorial counterparts, I share these insights on best practices on how we can address intersectional and regional inequalities in our country.

Through these conversations, it is clear that there isn't a woman, girl or gender-diverse person in our country whose lives haven't been impacted at some point by gender inequality. This isn't news for anyone in this room. We know this. Discrimination and sys-

temic inequalities remain an issue in Canada, particularly for racialized and under-represented women, girls, LGBTQ and gender-diverse people, to the detriment of us all.

I believe, and I know that this vision is shared here today, that everyone should have an equal chance to fully participate in Canada's social, economic and democratic life regardless of their gender identity, expression or sexual orientation. I dream of a Canada where every child grows up not only believing but also witnessing that this is possible.

We remain deeply committed to working in close collaboration with provinces, territories, indigenous partners and civil society stakeholders to prevent and address gender-based violence and human trafficking, which we know are two of the most significant barriers to gender equality in Canada. Budget 2021 committed \$601.3 million over five years to advance towards a new national action plan to end gender-based violence. Of this, \$415 million went to Women and Gender Equality Canada.

Budget 2022 proposes to invest a further \$539.3 million over five years to further advance the national action plan. This investment will allow provinces and territories to supplement and enhance services and supports within their jurisdictions to prevent GBV and support victims and survivors.

We've also sustained our commitment to gender-based analysis plus, also known as GBA+. This analytical tool helps make sure that budget and policy decisions are evidence-based, that they contribute to greater equality and that initiatives funded through the budget process respond to the needs of diverse people.

We're also taking concrete action to advance equality and protect LGBTQ2 rights. Many LGBTQ2 people in Canada continue to face significant barriers, including negative mental health impacts, homelessness, under-employment, harassment, bullying and violence. We know that these challenges are further amplified for LGBTQ2 people with intersecting lived experiences, including indigenous, Black and racialized people, as well as people with disabilities. Budget 2022 proposes \$100 million to be invested over five years to implement the first-ever federal LGBTQ action plan, which will be designed to support a fairer and more equal future for LGBTQ people in our country. This also includes seeking out projects and initiatives that address the unique needs of LGBTQ2 communities through LGBTQ2 projects fund and the capacity fund.

We are also addressing period poverty in Canada because we know too many women, girls, trans and non-binary people can't afford menstrual products. This lack of access paired with period shame and stigma makes it hard for people to fully participate in public life. Menstrual products are a basic necessity and essential to sexual and reproductive health and rights. It's for these reasons we will be working with federal partners to begin developing a menstrual equity fund to provide period products to those in need. Budget 2022 commits \$25 million over two years to begin a national pilot project. I have tasked my parliamentary secretary, Jenna Suds, who has my full confidence, to lead this important work.

Madam Chair, this new funding builds on historic investments towards building a strong and vibrant women's and equality-seeking movement. It is not new, though. Our government has provided more than \$475 million to organizations to ensure that everyone can participate fully in Canadian society.

Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

• (1430)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going start our first round.

I just want to let everybody know that Minister Ien does have a hard line at three o'clock and, unfortunately, we did start late today. I'm going to ask that questions specifically for the minister be asked in the first round and then as we're doing the second round, we'll really focus more on the departments so that Minister Ien can be on her way. I know how busy her schedule is.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Did I understand it was until 5 p.m.?

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry...?

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: When does the minister have to leave?

The Chair: Minister Ien has to leave at three o'clock, so I'm just going to focus on everything we can do with Minister Ien until three o'clock.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Okay.

[English]

It's not five o'clock.

The Chair: No, she's not staying until five. She's a busy lady.

[Translation]

Hon. Marci Ien: I will stay until 3 p.m.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, I'm going to pass it over now to Shelby.

You have six minutes.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Excellent. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll start quickly, as I have several questions that I want to address.

First, we know that this government, particularly the Prime Minister, claims to be a feminist government. That being said, in the main estimates, under the government bodies classified or at least named as departments, your department actually has the lowest amount of expenditure, lower than, for example, even the Department of Western Economic Diversification. It doesn't make sense, but I see that programming I would assume, as I think Canadians would, should be under your authority is actually under other departments'. Examples include a contribution under the women entrepreneurship strategy for \$61 million to Industry Canada, and the contributions for the women's enterprise initiative of just under \$3 million under Western Economic Diversification.

Minister, does the government not have faith in your particular ministry to administer these programs, or is it perhaps that they feel other ministries are better suited to administering them?

More specifically, why is your ministry not being better funded to increase your capacity to administer programs that are relevant to women?

Hon. Marci Ien: As I said before, this is an all-of-government approach. We are dealing with women, who make up more than half of our country. What this means is that I work together with my cabinet colleagues, like Minister Miller, like Minister Hajdu, like Minister Hussen, like Minister Anand and so forth. We work together, and we then culminate all that we can.

I support, and our ministry does, in every way GBA+ and other initiatives, but we are talking about women in this country, Shelby, and as pointed out earlier, it's women and housing, women and immigration, women and defence, and women and heritage and cultural issues. This is an all-of-government approach. This is not about something that I am doing alone. We are doing this together.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Fair enough. Thank you. I'll go to my next question.

Minister, in 2019, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates released a report listing a number of issues with the estimates process. The principle complaint was that the estimates, which are supposed to give parliamentarians a guide to government expenditures, does not include the primary spending measures of that fiscal year—the budget. How are we, as parliamentarians, supposed to do our job if the Treasury Board and Finance Canada are giving us out-of-date information?

Before I finish, I would like to note that I really don't want to hear “waiting for the supplementary estimates”, which is not strong enough. We're supposed to know the day of and not wait until May, when we've already passed the budget. I'm just concerned with some clarity in this particular area.

Hon. Marci Ien: Shelby, you might repeat the last part of your question, because I missed it. I'm so sorry. I caught you up until, "I don't want to hear".

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: The main question is how we, as parliamentarians on all sides of the House, are supposed to do our jobs if the Treasury Board and Finance Canada are giving us out-of-date information.

Hon. Marci Ien: The President of the Treasury Board, Minister Fortier, and her team are working hand-in-hand with all of us in cabinet to do all that we can in a very timely way. There will be reports and there will be information coming forward in a timely way so that, of course, MPs like you, and those right across the board, across the floor, can do their work.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Terrific.

Lastly, earlier this year, I filed an Order Paper question asking what percentage of bureaucrats received bonuses, divided up between executives and non-executives. I received the results on May 9 and, quite frankly, I was appalled at the results. In almost every single department, 90%-plus of already overpaid executives received bonuses while the non-executive payout was consistently in the single digits. For example, in your particular department, you paid out bonuses to 94.1% of your executives.

Minister, do you know how many bonuses were issued to your non-executives?

• (1435)

Hon. Marci Ien: Thank you so much for the question, Shelby. I will get back to you on that question.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Okay. Thank you.

I know that you are relatively new as a minister. However, in 2021 your department set out 11 indicators or targets to be achieved, and Treasury Board measures these. Recognizing that you are new, I'm not trying to attack you at all. I'm trying to seek clarity on this. Why is your department failing to meet two of the criteria?

More importantly, why has your department failed to even set guidelines on four of the others? What is the reason for the delay? Is the government not providing you with the tools necessary to do that job? What is it?

Hon. Marci Ien: Shelby, thank you again.

I will say that I am new but mighty. I'm not new to lived experience. I am not new to the 53 years, almost, that I've had on this earth as a Black woman, as a racialized woman. I would point that out.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Fair enough. We're both new.

Hon. Marci Ien: Lived experience is something. We work in a place called the House of Commons, and I stress the "Commons" part.

I would say thank you and I appreciate that you're not trying to attack in any way, but I will say I'm new, but experienced in life, as we all are.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. We're going to have to move on. I'm sorry about that.

We will now go to Sonia Sidhu, who's online with us.

Sonia, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister and officials, for being with us.

Minister, thank you for all of your hard work to advance gender equality across Canada. I agree with your vision. I also liked your statement that you dream of a Canada where every child grows up knowing they can do anything and be exactly who they are. I love that statement.

Minister, we will always defend our women's right to choose. The development in *Roe v. Wade* shows us why we need to stand up so that everyone in Canada can access safe abortion services. On the \$3.5-billion funding announcement that you made last week to strengthen access to abortion in Canada, can you let us know how someone can access these safe services if they need to?

Hon. Marci Ien: Thank you so much, Sonia, for the question. It's an important one.

I know that so many women, when we saw the leaked *Roe v. Wade*... We're not sure if it's a decision yet, but when we saw that leaked, it took us aback. There are no borders when it comes to that. Women here in Canada felt that pain and marched in our streets. We have to understand that a threat to rights anywhere, including our friends to the south, is a threat to women's rights everywhere.

It is simple for us and our government, Sonia. Individuals alone hold the right to make decisions about their own bodies. Limitations placed on this right are absolutely unacceptable. Access to basic health care is not a matter of debate. Our government is deeply invested in creating an equal and inclusive society that reflects that in terms of maintaining the right to choose.

Our message has been clear from the very beginning. The right to an abortion and access to abortion—access was at the heart of your question—go hand in hand. Every person in our country should have access to safe, equitable and consistent health care services. Through \$45 million in sexual and reproductive health, a fund that we have, we're making sure that Canadians facing obstacles in accessing reproductive health care are supported financially.

Organizations on the ground that are providing these essential services, which is what's important here, are provided with vital capacity funding. We are hearing from our stakeholders on what they need. They serve communities whether they are urban, whether they are rural or whether they are indigenous, and they are telling us what's necessary and how they can serve better. We're listening. Our government is deeply invested in creating an equal and inclusive society. That includes continuing, always, to protect the right to choose.

• (1440)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you for that very important answer.

Minister, you recently visited an organization in Brampton South, Roots Community Services, which provides on-the-ground support to help prevent intimate partner violence, support young leaders and do so much more. They take a culturally sensitive approach.

Can you speak to why it is so important to reduce barriers, especially on the cultural side? Can you expand on that?

Hon. Marci Ien: That's an important question, Sonia. Thank you so much for introducing me to that organization and helping me understand exactly what it does.

I am speaking to you as a child of West Indian parents, immigrant parents. The need for a cultural approach to this is something I have seen first-hand. Often, in various cultures, when there is violence, such as intimate partner violence and gender-based violence, the culture dictates that people stay, that women stay, because once you're together you stay. That is a reality right across this country. It is something that I know to be true.

To have culturally appropriate services to highlight specifically what is needed in various communities is important. If a woman is experiencing intimate partner violence and doesn't have anywhere to go, that's a huge problem. If she can go to a centre that she knows speaks directly to her culture, that helps. That can save lives.

I'll add one more thing here, Sonia. I think I said this before, but I will reiterate it. For indigenous culture, during the pandemic, culturally relevant centres—friendship centres—across our country, whose doors were open and that my ministry supported, talked to women who were experiencing violence and were there for them. This saved their lives and helped them, and saved the lives of their children.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for indulging me.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I'm now going to pass the floor over to Andréanne Larouche for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I also thank the minister for joining us today both in the context of our study and to present her department's main estimates.

Ms. Ien, in the 2022–2023 main estimates, your department's budget increased by \$73.8 million, to just over \$310 million. That is a 30% increase over the previous year.

Do you have a better idea of how that additional \$73.8 million will be spent? If you could give us some details, it would help us get a more concrete understanding of how this budget envelope will be spent.

[*English*]

Hon. Marci Ien: Thank you so much, Andréanne, for the question.

My mandate with the national action plan has been given half a billion dollars. That is significant. I would also say it's a good start. As the Deputy Prime Minister has pointed out, this is one of four budgets so there are other things to come.

For a specific breakdown, can I ask you to clarify exactly what you want to know?

• (1445)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: I will put my other questions to you, which may help you clarify how the expenditures are broken down.

In your mandate letter, one of the things the Prime Minister asks you to do is “Create a Menstrual Equity Fund for women's shelters, not-for-profits, charities, community-based organizations and youth-led organizations to make menstrual products available to vulnerable women.”

Does your budget for this year include money for creating that fund? That could be an initiative implemented with the help of the additional \$73.8 million. It could be detailed and broken down.

If so, is that not an infringement on the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces? The distribution of menstrual products is a health issue, so it may come under the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces. Could you transfer the money to Quebec, for instance, unconditionally?

That's an example of a program.

I will then have questions on how the money will be distributed.

[*English*]

Hon. Marci Ien: Thank you so much, Andréanne.

You know that we have always worked hand in hand with Quebec when it comes to issues such as these. It is very important that we do. We have had at WAGE long-standing and positive relationships with provincial officials in Quebec. This takes place, as you likely know, bilaterally, as well as through the federal, provincial and territorial forum of ministers responsible for the status of women.

Last August, Canada announced an investment of more than \$44 million to Quebec to enhance the assault centres, the women's shelters that I had previously talked about, and other organizations that provide critical services and supports for those experiencing gender-based violence. This was an addition, Andréanne, to the nearly \$17.5 million in COVID emergency funding transferred directly to Quebec from Canada in 2020 and 2021, and it supported more than 300 organizations that needed that help. I will be even more particular: It was 347.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: So that money was already transferred. We know that your department funds many programs that promote the protection of individuals. But Quebec has its own measures, its own shelter network, which are connected to health care authorities and social services.

There have already been delays in the payments because conditions were imposed. My understanding is that money was transferred, but was that done unconditionally? Can the Government of Quebec manage the program itself, so as to avoid duplication of efforts? If your department has transferred the money, can it now focus on the provinces that don't have an integrated health and social services system, unlike Quebec, which has its own system to manage that money?

[English]

Hon. Marci Ien: As you know, Andr anne, it is capacity funding that my department provides—support—and I believe that what you're talking about is very much a provincial jurisdiction.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: So you acknowledge that, when it comes to shelters, money can sometimes be transferred, and that it has worked well with Quebec. As for conditions, there weren't any for those programs. Is that indeed the case? I would like to be sure that I understand, as conditions have been imposed in the past.

[English]

Hon. Marci Ien: I'm going to go back to the spring of 2020, Andr anne, to clarify the signed agreement we had with Quebec and to make sure this is on the record. In the spring of 2020, Canada and Quebec signed an agreement in order to transfer emergency funding to the province to support organizations and to support shelters helping women who were victims of domestic violence and abused women right across the province of Quebec. Then, after the spring of 2020, in August of 2021, Canada and Quebec amended the agreement to provide an additional \$44.4 million over two years to Quebec directly to continue to support frontline organizations in response and recovery to COVID-19.

Madam Chair, I see you encroaching....

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

I'm now going to turn the floor over to Niki Ashton for six minutes.

• (1450)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question for the minister is on the issue of the national inquiry and the calls for justice.

How many of the calls for justice from the national inquiry have been implemented by your government?

Hon. Marci Ien: Niki, thank you so much for the question.

As you know, we work hand in hand with ministers at WAGE, with Minister Hajdu and Minister Miller. We support Minister Hajdu and Minister Miller. That is the role we have.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Okay, that's very much understood, but of course we were looking for a number there. That comes rooted in the concern that nowhere near enough is being done to actually implement these calls for justice.

To that, the National Family and Survivors Circle commented on the missed opportunities to specifically reference how affected families, communities and survivors of gender-based violence would benefit from the funding allocated to indigenous communities for housing and trauma-informed mental wellness services. They talked about how budget 2022 missed the mark on those fronts.

What is your ministry doing to listen to the survivors circle and rectify these missed opportunities?

Hon. Marci Ien: I wouldn't characterize them as missed opportunities, Niki, and we have been listening. We've been listening hard.

You heard Minister Miller's testimony just minutes ago. You've heard from me. You know that this is a priority, so I would definitely not characterize this as a missed opportunity. The listening and the action continue.

Under the federal GBV strategy the key priority is to increase support for our most vulnerable populations. Indigenous populations are at the top of that, so of course it includes indigenous women, and of course it includes girls. This is something that is not just top of mind for us, but this is priority for us, Niki.

Since 2015, so I am going back seven years, now, before I worked with—

Ms. Niki Ashton: Perhaps, Madam Minister, with all due respect, I think we're moving on to a different topic.

Let's be clear. These aren't my words. Here I have the press release from the circle, which talks about how they were, in their own words, "left out of Federal Budget 2022", so I think it's very important that we not mischaracterize my comments. These are the comments of survivors and families themselves, and I think they merit respect.

Hon. Marci Ien: They absolutely do merit respect, Niki, but I will say that nobody was left out. We are engaging. Minister Miller said this before as well. This is not a matter of disrespecting anyone.

The indigenous communities that I speak to, and I am in touch with often, understand that we have their best interests at heart, but they also lead and we listen.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Exactly. Yes, I appreciate that and I think we're all very clear on the need to respect the language that they're using, and clearly they've expressed concern around, as they say, being "left out" of the federal budget.

I'll leave it there and then I'll go to another important topic.

There has been a lot of talk from your government about supporting access to abortion. Obviously many women across Canada are very concerned about what's happened in the States and the reactionary attack on a woman's right to choose. While we have the right here in Canada to access abortion, the reality is the question of access is very much a problem.

For example, we know that northern and rural women have a much greater problem in accessing abortion. Here in my region, for example, even though the abortion pill is free, only one doctor in our region, for example, is able to prescribe that. I think we can all agree that's not the kind of access that there is much to celebrate about. I acknowledge women here in our region—and I've been proud to support them—have fought to expand that access, but we're nowhere near where we should be.

I am wondering. What is your government doing, besides supporting the right to abortion? What are you doing exactly to expand access? I don't mean advocacy. I mean access, ensuring that there are doctors who will prescribe the abortion pill. I'm talking about pharmaceutical and surgical abortions, which are clearly largely inaccessible to many women across swaths of our country. What is your government doing to expand access in concrete terms?

Hon. Marci Ien: I want to say that our government is working on providing further access and of course there is much work to do. You're right that this is a large country and when it comes to rural, when it comes to indigenous, when it comes to racialized women in many cases, the access isn't there. That's why Minister Duclos and I, just some days ago, made announcements, along with a couple of organizations that are working on exactly what you're talking about, Niki, access.

Bear in mind, from a federal perspective, our role and the provincial roles are very different, but the announcements that Minister Duclos and I made were specifically targeted to exactly what you're talking about, things like connecting a woman in a rural area to a helpline, a line that can tell her where she can go and help her to get there, that can talk her through perhaps a very traumatic experience and is there for her.

These are the kinds of things that our government is doing to help to provide access through organizations on the ground.

● (1455)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Ien.

Just to let you know, I have been speaking to people around the room. If you haven't seen me in the chair the entire time, it's be-

cause I'm just trying to see where everybody is at. I know there are a few others who have time issues for today as well, whether it's travelling home or meetings at 3:30, so in the room we have gathered consensus that we are going to go directly to the votes.

Are there any issues there? Okay.

Minister Ien, and to everybody who has come from the department, thank you so much for your time. We really do appreciate this.

[*Translation*]

Have a great weekend.

[*English*]

Thank you so much.

We are now going to get on to our votes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marci Ien: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

We're going to vote on the main estimates for 2022-23.

DEPARTMENT FOR WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$58,957,562

Vote 5—Grants and contributions.....\$245,212,502

(Votes 1 and 5 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report the main estimates, 2022-23, to the House?

An hon. member: On division.

The Chair: That's excellent. You guys are so good at working together.

I just want to thank everybody. Today has been a really good day, even when we're dealing with time constraints and things like that. It's been an exceptional meeting, and I'm really proud of the work we are doing at this committee.

I am going to now adjourn this meeting so that we can all get back to the busy days we have ahead.

Thank you, everybody. Have a great constituency week.

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