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# Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

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Chair: The Honourable Marc Garneau





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• (1605)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Hon. Marc Garneau (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.)):** Good morning everyone and welcome to meeting No. 36 of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

[English]

We are gathered here today on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe nation.

My name is Marc Garneau. I'd like to welcome our witnesses who have joined us this afternoon as we study Bill C-29. We have with us Dr. Marie Wilson, former commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, appearing in person. We have Zebedee Nungak, also appearing in person.

[Translation]

We also have with us, by videoconference, Marjolaine Tshernish, general manager of the Institut Tshakapesh.

[English]

To ensure an orderly meeting, I'd like to outline a few rules to follow.

Members or witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services in English, French and Inuktitut are available for today's meeting. Please be patient with the interpretation; it takes a little while to get the translation done.

For those on video conference, the interpretation button is found at the bottom of your screen. It's a small globe, and you can listen in either floor, English, French or Inuktitut. If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately, and we will ensure interpretation is properly restored before we continue.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are not speaking, your microphone should be on mute. When speaking—and this is very important—please speak slowly and clearly; this is for the benefit of the interpreters.

I remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

Each witness will now be invited to make an opening statement of five minutes, which will then be followed by questions from the members of the committee.

We'll begin with Dr. Wilson. I'd like to invite you, Doctor, to begin with your opening statement.

**Dr. Marie Wilson (Former Commissioner, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, As an Individual):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Greetings to everyone. I'm really glad to be here on Algonquin territory. I'm here visiting from the Northwest Territories, from Treaty No. 8 territory. It's nice to be in a room with my member of Parliament and one of our fellow northerners, Member Idlout, as well.

As mentioned, I was one of the commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. What that means for today is that I was also one of the authors of the call to action that informs this particular legislative proposal.

As you know, we criss-crossed the country for six and a half years, listening to a very mixed legacy of painful achievements and devastating losses, including—as we all know by now—the loss of life itself in the thousands and still counting.

Our multivolume final reports and various summaries reflect all that we heard, and our 10 principles of reconciliation and our 94 calls to action charted a pathway forward for Canada, addressing action areas for all levels of government and all sectors of society. Among those was a call for a national council for reconciliation.

The significance of that, as we repeatedly heard from friends and colleagues both in Canada and internationally who had been involved in commissions and inquiries before, is that there's a need for an ongoing oversight mechanism; otherwise, things get forgotten and left on dusty shelves. There's a need for follow-up, not as a way to hold up continuing shame, but on the contrary to be able to track and monitor progress and hopefully improvement so that we can get all the full benefits of our work and the work of survivors for lasting impact to the benefit of all.

Today I want to make reference in passing to our call to action. Given time, I want to mostly point out areas where I hope you'll be open to hearing some suggestions for improvement of what is before you in your proposed legislation.

In 2015—on the fifth anniversary, at that point, of our report from the TRC—we expressed great frustration and concern about the slowness of the fulfillment of the calls to action. We specifically singled out the national council for reconciliation. The reason for that today is to say, “Finally, here we are.” I hope you'll hear what I'm saying as potential areas for improvement and not as anything I hope would ever be used as reasons for further delay.

I want to make observations in three specific areas.

The first is reconciliation as a shared purpose. I'll just say, for the analysts and others, that there is a longer form of this paper that I will provide for your purposes, but I'm just headlining here and hoping I'm not being too negative in the process.

The Bill C-29 summary says the purpose of the proposed legislation “is to advance efforts for reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.” I think the purpose statement itself can and should be much stronger, not just “to advance efforts for reconciliation” but to ensure reconciliation, and not just “with Indigenous Peoples”, but between and among indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. As we said throughout our reports and repeatedly ever since, reconciliation is about the establishment and maintenance of respectful relations between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.

Bill C-29 recognizes the need for an establishment of “an independent, non-political, permanent...organization”. I would offer that that language, too, could be even more precise to ensure that the non-political meaning is both independence from government and also non-partisan in spirit. That would be to protect its longevity, no matter which political party prevails in government over the years ahead.

The draft also uses the term “Indigenous-led”. Our TRC call to action does not use that terminology. Again, we specifically insisted, over the course of the commission and repeatedly since, that reconciliation is not an indigenous issue; it's a Canadian one. The very fact that we have this deliberation before a committee that is narrowly cast as “indigenous and northern affairs” underscores how easily reconciliation gets recast as an indigenous problem.

● (1610)

That's why we commissioners were very deliberate and precise in our wording in describing the oversight body with “membership jointly appointed by the Government of Canada and national Aboriginal organizations”—using the terminology of the day—and consisting of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members.

The Bill C-29 proposal as worded, including its model for appointment rather than a collaborative approach, creates a silo approach that potentially divides the council internally before it ever begins. I have comparative examples that I can offer if time allows in the discussion.

The second point I want to address is accountability to Parliament. This is all about public awareness and accountability for improvement.

The section about reporting to Parliament that we had in our call to action is entirely missing from the Bill C-29 draft. Parliament is where the laws were passed to enact residential schools. The House of Commons is where national political leaders stood in front of na-

tional indigenous leaders to apologize for the fallout of those schools and to promise to move forward in the spirit of reconciliation. Parliament is where all Canadians have an elected representative to hear regular progress reports on whether we are actually living up to these latest promises made on behalf of the people of Canada.

I want to stress that this public accountability also provides transparency for prioritizing what we need to do next to celebrate where things are getting better and to fuel our encouragement as a country to keep at it and to keep trying.

On the point of financial resources, I won't say a lot. I'll just say this: Regarding financial resources, the draft is simply too generic on that point, with a generalized reference to a further call to action 55. In my experience, an intention without certainty of resources focuses all early efforts simply on trying to find the means to function.

I want to conclude by reminding you of three of the TRC principles of reconciliation that are especially relevant to my points today and to your deliberations.

Number 6 is this:

All Canadians, as Treaty peoples, share responsibility for establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships.

Number 9 states:

Reconciliation requires political will, joint leadership, trust-building, accountability, and transparency, as well as a substantial investment of resources.

Number 10 is this:

Reconciliation requires sustained public education and dialogue, including youth engagement, about the history and legacy of residential schools, Treaties, and Indigenous rights, as well as the historical and contemporary contributions of Indigenous peoples to Canadian society.

I believe there's great urgency to these calls to action. Since we've already agreed, all parties across the House, that this is a priority, in recent elections commitments were also made on the issue of reconciliation. I hope that with a few amendments to strengthen the purpose and potential of this legislative proposal, all parliamentarians will move quickly to get the national council for reconciliation enacted and fairly resourced as soon as possible. We've called it a vital tool for our country to reap the benefits of ongoing education, introspection, course correction, and celebration. It's an honest mirror, hopefully, that will help us all become the world leader we claim we wish to be in matters of good and respectful relations between indigenous and non-indigenous citizens.

*Mahsi cho, qujannamiik, merci beaucoup, and meegwetch.*

Thank you very much.

● (1615)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Dr. Wilson.



Hello. Greetings to you all.

[Translation]

Thank you for this invitation to contribute to the process that confirms the great importance of dialogue prior to implementing major projects for the benefit of the greatest number, including members of the First Nations of Quebec.

I am an Innu from the community of Mani-Utenam on the north shore of the province of Quebec. I am the general manager of the Institut Tshakapesh, an organization that has been in existence for almost 45 years.

Giving an Indigenous nation the right to speak is an appropriate and respectful way of recognizing it as a nation. In the case of Bill C-29, this means recognition of its mother tongue and the language spoken in its region, its contextual environment, its geographic context, and its specific needs.

Often, the Innu nation of Quebec, which has French as its second language spoken, does not recognize itself in the way relations between the federal government and anglophone Indigenous people. It sometimes feels excluded from the major discussions. As a result, we feel powerless to act within those discussions. Today, I want to thank you for inviting us.

This linguistic specificity must now be taken into consideration. It may have very significant consequences for our communities, in particular socioeconomic consequences.

Since we live in eastern Canada and our spoken language, other than our mother tongue, is French, it is important that we be taken into account in allocating certain seats reserved for Indigenous people in Canada. It is important to allow members of First Nations who use French to have a place in major political discussions. As well, the documentation has to exist in that language so that these nations are able to speak freely in the official language in which they are fluent.

I also wanted to remind you that when Bill C-91 concerning Indigenous languages was announced, the Assembly of First Nations, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and the Métis National Council participated in drafting it.

I note that there was no joint drafting in the case of Bill C-29. An interim committee was appointed by the ministers. I do not doubt the quality of the work done, but I must point out that we received no information in the regions. When Bill C-91 was drafted, we received information in the regions. We were informed even before the bill was announced and throughout the process until it was passed.

In this case, however, were it not for the member for Manicouagan, Marilène Gill, I would not have been made aware of the existence of Bill C-29.

Obviously, we are pleased with the initiative that establishes a national council for reconciliation, which responds to calls to action 53 to 55 issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

I particularly want to make recommendations relating to the composition of the board of directors, specifically for adding another organization. There are the transitional committee and the office of the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, but it would be wise to add the Assembly of First Nations or another organization so that more people would be able to choose the directors.

The francophone region of Quebec should also be represented on the board of directors so that we are able to receive information in our region.

• (1625)

It is also important that one third of the Indigenous directors be candidates who acknowledge the existence of systemic racism. This is very important going forward, for the work of the National Council for Reconciliation.

We must make sure there is equitable representation of men and women on the board of directors and that it includes elders and former residential school students or children of residential school survivors. It is important that this sensitivity be reflected in the work of the National Council for Reconciliation.

We must also make sure that the directors do not have a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest with the National Council for Reconciliation.

When the National Council for Reconciliation is created, it will be important to make sure that it has all the resources at the start that it needs in order to fully do its work, to perform its mandate. Even today, we are not hearing anything about the members of the transitional committee created last year. That is probably because they do not have the resources they need to perform their mandate. They are invisible. So it is important for the National Council for Reconciliation to be operational quickly, for it to be visible and accessible, and for it to be possible to see the work it is doing.

I would like to make one comment on accountability. I have seen that all levels of government, that is, the federal government, the provinces and the First Nations, had to provide data, at its request, to the National Council of Reconciliation so it could submit reports on the progress being made towards reconciliation. It is therefore essential that the Council have access to that data, which it be from the provincial or federal government or from the First Nations band councils. The data in question in the bill is under federal or provincial jurisdiction, or under the jurisdiction of a First Nations nation or band council.

I don't know whether I have any time left.

• (1630)

**The Chair:** In fact, you have used all the time allotted to you, so I am going to ask you to wrap up quickly.

**Ms. Marjolaine Tshernish:** I am going to move on to my last point. When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was created in 2008, we were told its purpose was reconciliation among the former students, their families, their communities and all Canadians. If that is still the case, it has to be made clear in the bill and in the mandate of the National Council for Reconciliation.

**The Chair:** Very good. Thank you, Ms. Tshernish.

You may be able to address that subject during the question period.

[English]

Colleagues, we have a witness who was going to appear in the second hour but needs to appear now, so I'm going to open the mike to somebody from that second hour. Chief Jean-Charles Piétacho of the Innu Nation will speak at this point in time.

[Translation]

Chief Piétacho, the floor is yours for five minutes.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Vanessa Davies):** Chief Piétacho, your microphone is on mute.

**The Chair:** The floor is yours.

**Chief Jean-Charles Piétacho (Innu Nation):** We have been put on mute for a long time.

**The Chair:** I understand that. It happens to us all.

**Chief Jean-Charles Piétacho:** We were on mute since you arrived, more than 500 years ago.

[Witness spoke in Innu as follows:]

Tshipushukatitunau kassinu etashiek(u), ni mishta minuaniten e kashikat e nishtuatakanit nitassinan eka nita ka pitshitimamat mak ne assi anite mekuat e taiek(u) anishinabe utassiuau ekuen ne kie iat apu nita putshinikan.

[Innu text interpreted as follows:]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone. I am happy to acknowledge that we are on land that has never been ceded. The land you are on is Anishinabe land and has never been ceded.

[Translation]

I would simply like to make sure that you have interpretation.

[English]

**The Chair:** Madame Clerk, do we have interpretation for the chief?

**The Clerk:** Yes, the interpreter is here. He is standing by. I believe he is interpreting because I can see people nodding around the room.

**The Chair:** Very good.

[Translation]

Chief Piétacho, the floor is yours.

**Chief Jean-Charles Piétacho:** [Witness spoke in Innu as follows:]

E nitishinikatikun Innu utshimau Jean-Charles Piétacho, anite nutshipin Ekuanitshit mak pua iat innuat uet taian ute anutshish kashikat. Niminueniten maniat tshetshe kie ninan minitat e uapata-mat mashinaikan C29 ne utin ua tutakanit mashinaikan ka mamuitun tshetshi utin kau taku minupanitun. Ni uiten tshishat shaputue, shaputue nika utin ua tutakanit tshekuan ka minuaa ne. Mi-am nashatumikan ne mashinaikan ka unuipanitaka itashtet...

[Innu text interpreted as follows:]

My name is Chief Jean-Charles Piétacho. I come from the community of Ekuanitshit, and I am here at the committee on behalf of that community.

I am proud to be here and to submit our brief on Bill C-29. Truth and reconciliation are going to come about. I want to talk about this. Everything that has been said before...

[English]

**Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.):** Mr. Chairman, I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, sir.

[Translation]

Please wait, Chief Piétacho.

[English]

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** I'm not finding the translation.

**The Clerk:** Perhaps I could remind the member, sir, that it takes a while. The interpreter works from Innu to French and then it has to be relayed from French to English.

**The Chair:** Is that understood, Mr. McLeod?

It's a double one here. It's interpreted in French and then it has to be translated to English. It does cause a delay.

• (1635)

[Translation]

Please continue, Chief Piétacho.

**Chief Jean-Charles Piétacho:** What?

**The Chair:** Please continue speaking and make your presentation.

**Chief Jean-Charles Piétacho:** Do I continue doing it in my language?

**The Chair:** That is up to you.

**Chief Jean-Charles Piétacho:** Right.

[English]

**The Clerk:** I'm so sorry, Mr. Chair.

The tech personnel is telling me that something is wrong with the interpretation from French to English. We might have to suspend while we inquire as to what's wrong.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Right.

Chief Piétacho, unfortunately, there is a problem with the interpretation from French to English.

We are going to suspend the meeting temporarily.

Please wait before resuming your opening address.

**Chief Jean-Charles Piétacho:** There are always problems when I am the one talking.

**The Chair:** It's complicated, because we have to deal with three languages at the same time.

**Chief Jean-Charles Piétacho:** Recognize our language as an official language! There are three languages in Canada: French, English and Innu.

*[Witness spoke in Innu, interpreted as follows:]*

I could speak in French.

*[Translation]*

That being said, I could speak in my second language to facilitate things.

*[English]*

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk, are we resolving the issue with the translation?

*[Translation]*

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Mr. Chair, the clerk is not here, but the technicians are telling me the problem is fixed.

**The Chair:** Right. That's good.

We will hope that everything works this time.

Chief Piétacho, please complete your opening address so we can move on to the questions.

**Chief Jean-Charles Piétacho:** I have lost speaking time.

*[Witness spoke in Innu as follows:]*

Nin u katshishkutamuan , anite ka manenimanit nete katshishkutamanit. Anutshish kashikat eshikimutshishikua nitshishpeuatshishunan

*[Innu text interpreted as follows:]*

I am a former residential school student and every day I remember everything that happened in the school.

*[English]*

**The Clerk:** Mr. Chair, if I could come back, we've spoken to the interpreter. The situation is that three interpreters are at one end of the room and the English interpreter is across the room in a separate booth. They couldn't see each other.

Anyway, we've worked it out and we're ready to begin. Perhaps we can begin again, from the top.

**The Chair:** Very good.

*[Translation]*

Chief Piétacho, please start over.

**Chief Jean-Charles Piétacho:** Do I start over in Innu?

**The Chair:** Yes, we are trying to do it in one go this time.

**Chief Jean-Charles Piétacho:** Let us hope. I am losing my five minutes' speaking time.

**The Chair:** We are listening to you.

**Chief Jean-Charles Piétacho:** *[Witness spoke in Innu as follows:]*

Nin u katshishkutamuan, anite ka manenimanit nete katshishkutamanit.

Anutshish kashikat eshikimutshishikua nitshishpeuatshishunan. Ne ne neme ka nekatshikuaiat, natshishk, nimashinataukunan, nimashinataukunan ka tutakuaiak nete animishun a taiat mak ne ush-tapinitshishuiat ne kassinu tshekuan e ishinakuat.

Shash nishtinuepupunnua eshpish nin tshishpeuataman tshetshi takut mininiun eshakamitshishikua. Ne anite nuitshi-atuissetshishun kie nuitshi-atussemauat kassinu nuitsheukana. Kie minat naitenan mishta-mitshetua naitenan, anutshish kashikatshi tshuitamatunan minuat nimashinaikanan nitutetan, minuat kaimishit nitshishkuan, nitutenan tshetshi nitshishkatshiat. Nuash nitatanan tshishe-utshimauat, mishta-mitshet, mishta-mitshetua tshitaitimunan, mashinaikanan nititshitashaanan. Kassinu anite e uitamatat, nitipenitamunan, nitaimunan. Ne nitissenitamunan nitassinan. Ninan ka ka ka ishi-aimiaiat, ka itashpishuiat nitipatshimunan, nutim, nutim ne. Tshipa ui peikua nishtuapatakanu. Ekuen ni mishtakashekan innu ume nin tsha. Innu nanitam nen ka ushinak, ka papit ekuen ne ekuen ne uet taiat ute ni ninan, ka mishikaieku ka itat, eshe ute tshitana nitassinan. Kie apitin ne, mishta-apitina ne aimuna, uetinimuni tsha mishta apitina.

Kie ma tshetshi uinan auen ate ninan, atiku, atiku ishinikatanu tsha. Ekuen tshe ui tutamak, eku muku tshiam ekuen pimitakanu. Apu takut nishtutatun, muk u tshiam aiminanun tsha, muku tshi aiminanun. Ninan tsha muku tshiam ni uatenan, tshetshi nikanitenan, tshetshi uauitakan tshetshi auen minu-inniut, nenu tshetshi kau minu-pinitunan mak tshetshi kau ueshtapinitakan. Ne ne eishinakuniniti nikan tshetshi tshishpeutakan ne tshipa ishinakuanu tshetshi uauitak nenu ne niuauitenanua tsha nipi tsha. Nitshishenimanan nenu apu tshissenitak eshpish pukatat kie nenu upukutaunua kie utaimunua nanitam tshika ui nikanishtenu, metuat tshika ui teuat anite tshetshi atat anite nikan tshiminitakanitshi tshekuan. Ekuen ne ninan ua issishieiat tsha tsha minuanu tutak ne ua tshimanan nenu tshishe-innua nenu anat tshetshi tshiminitshi, tshetshi uitamuti, mak tshetshi akanishau-iminit, tshetshi mishkutui-imminiti kie innu-aiminitshi tshetshi miniat.

Pate ne ne mashinaikan ka takuat les nations unies. Ne nitapash-tanan ne ki uitakanu nete mishta apashtat aimun ua tshishpeuatet a, ekuen tshipa ishinakuannu tshetshi minat tshishe-innua tshetshi aiminitshi miam ume nin e itueian anutshish. Ekuen ne nin tshe ui iteut nitshishenimanan. Ekuen ne peiku tshekuan tshipa ui tutenan tsha. Kie ishinakuannu nutim ne, ne ua tshimanan tsha. Tshetshi nutim auenua utinimuat utaimunnu. Ate ne ishinakuan man tsha nimishta-ishpitenunan ute ninan innuat, muku ne ishpanu nete ninan mitshiteu nititanan. Nete ishpinitanun nete kassinu tshekuan nete nitimit ekuen ne ninan ekuta nete nimishta-ishpitenenan. Nititanan u ninan ute nina ni mishtukushiu-imminan. Nemi ne e nanatuapataman, apu tshishpeuataman mishtukushiu-aimun muku ni issishuen tsha, tshipa ishinakuan tshetshi kassinu katshitinitamat, tshetshi katshitinitamat e mishtakushiushtet. Ekuen ne muku tshiam ua ishi nanatuenitaman tsha. Ishkueuat mishta-apitishut, ishkuaut tsha, tshipa ishinakuanu tshetshi takunit utupunau anitshenat ishkuet ne ne ua tshimanan minat tshekuan tsha.



Mishta apitin uesh u anutshish nanatuapamanut ka nipianit, ka uinianit tsha. Eshku en takuen, apu punipin nenu tshipa ui tsha teu kue uinua. Kie kuish e iminanit ne ne ne nanikutinit tsha tshuishamauat auenitshenat. aputshissenimekuat auenitshen tshissinanimatauat tshe issishuet ninan u innuat. Ninan apu tshi issisheiat innuat nanan tshe ka tukushinit a. Ek ume anutshish nin kashikat, apu shut anite nui natshik anite tshishe-utshimasset kie mak anite kutuka, kie mak anite e utenau nitshissenitenan nen. Mishkuat ma uin, tshipa ui, tshipa ui shutshishimikuan a tshetshi eka anite minanit shutshishiunnu a, ninan u ishinakuen, nina u ishinakuannu tshetshi minan shutshishiun a. Mak patetatatunu, kutuasht ka iteshtet ne nikan ka tat mekuen nen ne Trudeau. Ekuen ne e ishinakuninit tshetshi tshiuenamuat aimunnu mak ishinakunipin, ka pitshitinak ka ishimit tshi tutamak ne ninan ekuan ne ishinakuat tshetshi itetan tsha, tshin ne tshitan anite apu tshikut tshi issishuet neme utat, tshinuau tshinua ishinakuan tshetshi miniat kau aimun. Ekuan ne

*[Innu text interpreted as follows:]*

I am a former residential school student. I defend myself every day.

Everything that happened in the past has made us internalize the anger for too long. Personally, I have always sought peace with our colleagues.

Once again, we have said it often and we say it again, we have made reports, we have consulted lawyers, we have even met with the government. We have called you over and over. We have told you: our rights, our languages, our knowledge, our land, our religions, our traditions, our histories, everything, must be recognized! Everything must be recognized. I am an Innu. An Innu is someone who is always laughing.

When you arrived, we told you that you were on our land. The words spoken are important. Take the example of the caribou. We have to protect our rights, our elders, their knowledge, everything they know, their languages, in concrete ways. We have to put them first at all times. The organization that is to be created should emphasize language, culture, elders. The report written by the United Nations said that the culture had to be defended. That is also what our elders say. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada calls for that respect.

We ourselves are really in the east, but the decisions are often made in the west and the documents should really be sent to us in French. Women are important too, and room must be made for Innu women. We must not forget the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

The government has to listen to us. It must be made to listen. We should have that power. Prime Minister Trudeau is the one responsible for this.

• (1640)

It is up to you to give us back our voice.

*[Translation]*

**The Chair:** Thank you for your presentation, Chief Piétacho.

We apologize for the technical difficulties.

*[English]*

With that, we will go to the round of questions beginning with Mr. Melillo, for six minutes.

**Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC):** Actually, Mr. Chair, it's going to be Mr. Vidal. I'm sorry you didn't get informed of the change.

**The Chair:** Okay, that's no problem.

Go ahead, Mr. Vidal.

• (1645)

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Thank you, sir.

Thank you to all the witnesses today for your testimony and your contribution to this bill and for trying to make it as strong and good a bill as possible.

I have a few questions for Ms. Wilson first, please.

I appreciate many of the things you said and many of the areas that you struck on. I'm only going to get to a few of them. If it sounds like I'm hurrying, it's because I am because I want to get to a number of them.

You talked about the calls to action, and the call to action 56 explicitly states that the Prime Minister should answer to the National Council for Reconciliation's annual report that gets presented ultimately to Parliament through the minister, but the legislation actually passes that responsibility to the minister, not the Prime Minister.

Would you agree that should be amended back to ensuring that the Prime Minister responds and reports to that?

**Dr. Marie Wilson:** Yes, I personally would agree. Just as I made the point, no disregard intended to this committee, I also think that anything that narrows the focus to indigenous only or an Indigenous concern only misses the point of all of Canada, so I do agree with that.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Thank you. I appreciate that. I know I'm doing a little bit of a rapid fire here. I appreciate your response.

You talked as well about independence and in the bill there's a section on protocol. Clause 16 talks about the minister, in collaboration with the council, developing a protocol respecting the disclosure of information by the Government of Canada to the council.

I'm a little bit concerned, and I wonder if you share the concern that it would be the responsibility of the minister to develop the protocol and the information that is provided to the council. I'm not sure that the minister should be the one who is dictating the protocol to the council that's ultimately going to hold the government to account for reconciliation.

Would you agree that maybe the language could be changed to have somebody else develop that protocol?

**Dr. Marie Wilson:** I'm a big supporter of co-development, first of all, as I am with co-drafting of legislation. It's my understanding that so far this has not been co-drafted so that's already a missed opportunity.

I think if you want to have a protocol that serves everyone, then it needs to be co-considered from the conceptual stages onward.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Thank you.

You also commented on clause 8 on the initial appointment of the first board of directors. Again, the language has been softened from what you talked about in the original calls to action and recommendations even of the interim board that were made back in 2018, where again it's the minister in this clause "in collaboration with", but your language says it should be jointly done when we appoint the first board of directors.

I'm assuming from what you said that you would support an amendment to switch that back to "jointly appointed" for the board of directors.

**Dr. Marie Wilson:** That is my view, but I will just say that in our call to action we do use the word "collaboration" in the call to action. We use both words, but we talk specifically about jointly when it comes to the composition.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Thank you.

It's my opinion that done jointly is a little stronger language and I would like to see that.

**Dr. Marie Wilson:** One is more about the spirit of it, and the other is the operational practicality of it. That's how I see it.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Right, that's fair.

I'm coming a little bit more back to call to action number 55. There is a number of really measurable items in call to action 55 by which we could measure progress. There are things that are very quantifiable, and we don't find those actually in the legislation in the purpose and function section.

I'm curious. You said we don't want to shame anyone but we want to monitor and measure progress effectively. There is the old saying that what gets measured gets done. I wonder if you would support the concept of ensuring that the specific items in call to action 55 are included but I would like to also suggest maybe it be not just limited to those, that there would be other measurable items that could help us really successfully measure our journey toward reconciliation.

Would you agree with that?

**Dr. Marie Wilson:** Yes, I do agree, and we actually do say that these are not meant to be exhaustive lists.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Exactly.

**Dr. Marie Wilson:** They're examples and they may not be the ones, frankly, that prove to be relevant in every region of the country. Over time we may see that in certain areas drilling down in a certain area is more important than somewhere else.

It's an iterative thing, but it's not meant to be exhaustive, and it's not meant to assume that it's going to be perfect out of the gate either.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** I perfectly agree with you. I just think it's really important that we have some quantifiable things. There are some examples of very quantifiable things, so thank you for that.

**Dr. Marie Wilson:** Yes. It's not intended to say, "Gee, I wonder what we should measure." I mean, we've given some very particular things where we know we're in big trouble, so let's start there.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Exactly. Thank you.

I have a last question before I run out of time. I'm going to frame this very quickly.

Dr. Wilton Littlechild, who was a member of both the interim board and the transitional committee, expressed some frustration around the term "efforts for" in the legislation. I think the sense is that it's kind of fluffy or soft. We find in the legislation, even though it was not in the interim board's draft legislation, the term "efforts for" six times.

I'm curious to know whether you would support the amendments that would suggest maybe we should take out the words "efforts for", and in the context it would change is to say that we're actually talking about advancing reconciliation rather than just making efforts for. It kind of comes back to that measurable progress as well, I guess. Would you support that concept of maybe removing some of those terms, such as "efforts for"?

• (1650)

**Dr. Marie Wilson:** Yes. I did specifically say that today. I will make my written copy available, but I did say that somewhere in here.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** You talked about it in the "purpose" section, but it's also in other places in the bill a number of times. I want it to be the broader thing as well. That's why I asked.

**Dr. Marie Wilson:** Yes. It's repeated elsewhere. I had five minutes, so I couldn't go into it.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Fair enough. I would appreciate your sending your written comments. That would be great. Thank you.

I think I'm out of time, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** You're right, Mr. Vidal. Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Mr. McLeod for six minutes.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the presenters today. Those were very interesting presentations. It's too bad we don't have more time for everybody to really talk about everything they've put together.

Mr. Chair, I'm assuming that we have confirmation that everybody will be providing their speaking notes to us for review.

I have a question for Marie Wilson, who's from the Northwest Territories. It's good to see that we have representation from the north here. It's not something we always get with our witnesses.

I'm really glad you talked about this whole issue being a Canadian issue versus an indigenous issue. It's so important, I think, to have a non-political oversight body. This may be one body. We may need more. We may need another body—for UNDRIP, for example. This is something that is important. The makeup of the directors on it is also important. We heard some comments to that effect today.

I think you know very clearly that the north was really affected. Out of the 139 recognized residential schools, 32 were in the north, in the Northwest Territories or Yukon or Nunavut. On a per capita basis, the impact was significantly higher in our region. Given this, and given the level of the discussion on how directors should be selected or who should be a director and the number of people who are talking about wanting seats as directors from the national indigenous organizations, I want to ask you if you could speak to the importance of having voices from the territorial north appropriately included in the board and the work of the national council for reconciliation.

**Dr. Marie Wilson:** Thank you, Mr. McLeod, for the question.

I think it's a hugely important question, the makeup, and I commented on the issue of "indigenous-led" because I think it easily slides into something being a formulaic answer rather than a really well-thought-out answer.

The reason I questioned the use of that term.... I know it's a term that's almost automatically used without a shared sense of what it actually does mean. What does it mean? Does it mean numbers of people? Does it mean world view? Does it mean lived experiences? Does it mean per capita impact, as you've just suggested? Does it mean residential school survivors? Does it mean awareness of the history and the current critical needs, and representation being based on that? Does it mean commitment to shared principles of reconciliation?

Selecting a powerful council doesn't necessarily define around indigenous or non-indigenous or first nations or Inuit or anything in a quantifiable quota way, but rather to those issues of where we know there's a real need and representation. We know that whenever we go on a per capita basis on any national committees, the north is always under-represented. That's why you're able to make the comment you just made about having the north here. If you go on a per capita basis by population, the north will always be under-represented. If you go on criteria that talk about per capita impact of residential schools and the legacy, you'd have the highest single representation because of having the longest-running schools over a multi-generational time frame.

I think the question first of all is about how big a committee has to be to be functional, but it's also about how it structures itself so that you have a proper and informed voice and the proper matrix of skills you will need to be an effective national council. I think those are really critical issues.

If you're asking if I have a specific formula around that, no, I do not, but I think a vague one like that leaves itself open to just the usual political response of "one from here and one from here"—you know, like that. It doesn't always add up to the powerful mix you need.

• (1655)

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** Thank you for that.

I wanted to talk a little more about the composition and the work of the board of the national council for reconciliation and how important you think it is for the survivors of the residential school system to be included and involved. I heard it mentioned by another presenter here today, but I wanted to hear what you thought about that.

**The Chair:** Doctor, you have 45 seconds for your reply, please.

**Dr. Marie Wilson:** Okay.

I'll just say, first of all, to be very clear, that I have not been involved either at the level of the interim board or the transition team, so I don't know what thinking has already gone into that.

I do know that the national council, as we talked about at the level of the commission, needs to have some very particular skills. I do think that it needs to have, as our TRC did, survivors at the heart of its purpose. That can be as committee members or it can be as a parallel circle, an advisory circle. That's another way to do it. It's a different formula. It's so the heart and purpose of survivors—and intergenerational survivors, as was mentioned by one of the other intervenors—is ensured and assured.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. McLeod and Dr. Wilson.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Gill, the floor is yours for six minutes.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank all the witnesses.

Thank you, Ms. Wilson and Mr. Nungak.

[*Member spoke in Innu as follows:*]

Tshinashkumitinau, Innushkueu Tshernish mak innu-utshimau Pietacho.

[*Innu text translated as follows:*]

Thank you, Ms. Tshernish and Chief Pietacho.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for your testimony. I would like to hear from both of you. I have only six minutes, and you have seen how short that is, so I would like to leave room for you.





[English]

We have Chief Willie Sellars, Williams Lake First Nation, by video conference. We also have Okalik Eegeesiak, as an individual, also by video conference.

Welcome to our three witnesses today. In case you weren't watching the first hour, you will each be given time to make a five-minute opening statement, after which we will go to questions.

Without further ado, I invite Melissa Mbarki to start us off with a five-minute opening statement.

I don't see Ms. Mbarki. Is she with the group?

**The Clerk:** She was. I don't know where she went. Let me see if tech can reach out to her.

**The Chair:** While you're doing that, I'm going to pass the microphone to Chief Willie Sellars if he is ready to give his five-minute opening statement.

Mr. Sellars, are you willing to start it off?

**Chief Willie Sellars (Williams Lake First Nation):** Yes.

I have never presented to the committee, so is it an opening statement with regard to who I am and where I come from that we're looking for today?

**The Chair:** Well, you have an opportunity, Chief, to make a five-minute opening statement if there are specific things you want us to be aware of with respect to Bill C-29. This is just to set the table if you choose to do so. After all of the witnesses have spoken, we will be going to a question period.

• (1715)

**Chief Willie Sellars:** Melissa can go first, please. I see her there.

**The Chair:** Is Melissa Mbarki with us now?

**Ms. Melissa Mbarki (Policy Analyst and Outreach Coordinator, Indigenous Policy Program, Macdonald-Laurier Institute):** Yes, I am, and I can start.

**The Chair:** Please go ahead with a five-minute opening statement.

**Ms. Melissa Mbarki:** Thank you for allowing me to be here today to speak.

I grew up on the Muskowekwan First Nation located in Saskatchewan. The residential school on my reserve was operating from 1889 to 1997. The public school in the nearest town was a place for learning for the reserve children, the residential school children, and the farm and town children.

My home was about four kilometres from the residential school. I could see the lights from my deck at night. Many children ran away from this school and encountered a really rough terrain in my backyard. Sloughs, mud, uneven ice in the winter, and a dumpsite made it a dangerous path for children to take who ran away. We lost some of our community members in this area due to the conditions in the winter.

My earliest memories were of police searching this area if the staff at the residential school couldn't find a missing child or missing children who had run away. The residential school children

made friends with the reserve kids, and many of the older kids in my community actually housed these children for as long as they could.

The children did not want to be there. Many of them did not return; many of them committed suicide while they were on visits with their family. My brother lost his friend in grade 1, and I lost one of mine in grade 4.

The children who left the residential school did so with little education; many left with a grade 6 or grade 7 education. Many ended up in the child and family services system and many committed suicide or passed in tragic accidents. Most ended up with drug and alcohol addictions and are homeless or working in the sex trade today.

Talking about residential schools is not a comfortable conversation, but we must talk about the devastating impacts these schools had on indigenous families and communities. We must come up with solutions to the social and economic issues we face today.

It's been 25 years since the residential school closed on my reserve. We have no supports in place for anyone who attended this school. We don't have elder resources, timely mental health supports, or even addiction and health services. The nearest place to access these services is either 45 minutes or an hour and a half away from my community.

I don't think the committee will ever be non-partisan, so let's make sure that we include people from all different viewpoints and include people of all ages, because the general public seems to think residential schools were a hundred years ago. In actuality, the youngest residential school survivor in my community turned 33 this year, so this was in our lifetime, my lifetime.

Oftentimes I find that people are quite surprised at how young I am when I speak on panels or I write about residential schools. I write about the impacts that this had on my community, but we need people who can speak for reserves. Like myself, community members will tell you what is needed. I feel like our voices are overshadowed by politics, and in the spirit of reconciliation, I hope that we can bridge the gaps among all levels of government. This is the only way we will move forward.

We don't have time when people are dying on reserves from suicides and addictions. We don't have time when mass murders are happening on our reserves, and we don't have time when my family, my nieces, still live on the reserve. We don't have time.

What I want is this: We need accountability from every level of government. When funding announcements are made, we need to make sure these funds get to the communities that need them and we need to see the outcome of what this money did. We don't currently have that, and that is very frustrating, especially from my viewpoint, when I don't see things happening as quickly as they should be.

Another thing that we need to address is poverty. We must allow our communities to prosper. When I looked at the sections in the TRC report, I saw that number 92 mentioned building relationships and having “access to jobs”, but what about the funding? How do we get these jobs? How do we get access to training? Those are the questions I am asking today.

I thank you all for being here today to listen and to hear my story, which is not very well heard out in the general public. Lots of people don't know about the impact that intergenerational trauma had on me and my family and my community.

Thank you.

● (1720)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Mbarki.

We'll now go to Chief Sellers. It's not necessary, but if you wish to speak for five minutes, you have the microphone.

**Chief Willie Sellers:** I'd love to.

Thank you, Melissa, for sharing your story.

We look across this country at first nation communities, first nation reserves, and it doesn't matter how successful these communities are: We continue to see the same trends in trying to narrow that socio-economic or social gap in our way of life and the health and wellness of our communities.

I grew up my entire life on the Sugar Cane reserve, which is the Williams Lake First Nation, located just outside the city of Williams Lake. Surrounding Williams Lake are 14 different first nation communities, which range from the Secwepemc to the Tsilhqot'in to the Xat'sull. Heading further out west, we have the Nuxalk, and the Stl'atl'imx to the south.

A lot of the first nations from this region attended the St. Joseph's Mission residential school, which is located six kilometres from the community core of WLFN or Sugar Cane reserve. It's where my dad went to school. We are a generation removed from residential schools in our community, but we're still seeing the trauma—the direct trauma and the intergenerational trauma—filter through in our way of life. It's really impacting our balance as a community and as a people.

The reconciliation discussion is continuing to happen across this country, and the wrongs and the legacy of residential schools are coming to the forefront of discussions. It's really helping the healing journey of our communities and our provinces and, at the end of the day, our country. However, there is still so much work to do to narrow that gap.

I don't want to be talking about when reconciliation is going to be achieved with local politicians and thinking that there's a price tag attached to it. It's potentially generations from now that reconciliation is going to be achieved, because of how much education is needed around this topic of discussion.

We have an ongoing investigation over at St. Joseph's. We announced 93 anomalies last January. We're going to be doing a similar announcement for phase two of the investigation of the GPR work—the ground-penetrating radar work—and the research that we've been doing over the last couple of years.

This is a trigger not only for this region but for this country, every single time it happens. These triggers are happening almost on a monthly basis because of the number of schools in Canada and the history and wrongs of those schools.

I look into my community and at how successful we've been over the last two years, five years, 10 years. We are an economic powerhouse in this city of Williams Lake in the Cariboo Chilcotin region. We have numerous revenue streams. We reinvest our revenue back into the community. We have over 90 staff, 50% of whom are funded through that own-source revenue. We have programs and services. We have practically nil unemployment.

We look at all the benefits of being WLFN, and all the success we've seen and all the opportunities we have. However, we still have the same trauma in our community that everyone else does. We had three overdoses this year, and two suicides. For a small community like mine, with an on-reserve membership of 300 and an overall membership pushing 800, that is a big number.

How are we going to find this balance as indigenous people? The education component is a big part of that. Also, this language, ceremony, culture revitalization discussion needs to have continued investment, not only through time but also through money. That's exactly where our focus is going. Having the partnership and the support of the provincial and federal governments is also going to be a big part of that discussion.

Continuing to educate the local municipality, which is one of our neighbouring municipalities at the city of Williams Lake, is also a massive part of that discussion. Having the pressure from other government entities for them to continue to stand beside us and hold us up and educate themselves is also going to be paramount, and seeing the curve of health and wellness in our communities.

There is a lot of work to do around reconciliation, but at the same time we also have to acknowledge all the work that has been done to date and how the focus has continued to stay on it.

● (1725)

Let's continue to have this discussion and continue to push it so people will catch up and people will take that initiative and run with it, just as there are numerous examples of across this country, but again this should be a reminder of how much work we still need to do.

*Kukwstsetsemc*, and all my relations thank you. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Chief Sellers.

We'll go to our third witness, Okalik Eegeesiak.

Go ahead. You have five minutes.

**Ms. Josie Okalik Eegeesiak (As an Individual):** [*Witness spoke in Inuktitut as follows:*]





During this review of Bill C-29, we've heard from a few witnesses about the need for someone passionate to be at that table, someone who talks about economic reconciliation as a way to move forward. Do you agree?

**Ms. Melissa Mbarki:** I definitely agree.

If you look at my opening statement or Chief Willie Sellars' opening statement, he said his community has close to 0% unemployment. My community has 95% unemployment. This variation across the country and different reserves is definitely an issue we need to address. There is absolutely no way forward in my community unless we get jobs, end poverty and bring services into my community. It could even be health services, which could employ nurses and a technician. This is something my community needs. We have to look at the overall picture of what economic reconciliation looks like for each community, because it's going to look different for everyone.

I work in the oil and gas sector. I have been working in this industry for 15 years. It's been an industry that has kept me out of poverty. If I had stayed in my community, I would still be living in poverty. We have to look at ways of not hindering development and self-sovereignty and not hindering communities from accessing some very beneficial employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. That's what I'm continually seeing. This sector employs quite a number of indigenous people, and a lot of people are against it. I think indigenous people have a right to prosper however they want. This is something we should be looking at, going forward.

I don't think one committee can possibly take on all of our challenges. My suggestion for this would be to separate this committee. Have an economic side to it, an education and language side to it, and a social side to it that could implement healing or addiction centres. I don't think one committee can possibly handle all of this and give accountability numbers and so forth. You definitely have to bring other players into the picture. I don't think one committee can actually handle all of this.

• (1735)

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** I follow that up with a question regarding how we get there. Some indigenous leaders have said that the Indian Act is broken, paternalistic and outdated and causes a lot of the problems we see here. Would you agree that the act is a hindrance, in part, to indigenous economic reconciliation?

**Ms. Melissa Mbarki:** It's definitely hindering. It's a hindrance to communities because it puts us in a box and says that we need to do this or, if we want any kind of economic development in our community, we have to go by it first, so it's very paternalistic and doesn't allow communities to prosper. I think we have to move past that. I think we have to amend the Indian Act to allow us to be sovereign nations, to think for ourselves and to do for ourselves, because that's something that's missing from the equation.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Thank you very much. I have so many more questions for you, but I want to quickly go to Chief Sellars.

Todd Doherty says hello, by the way, Chief Sellars.

You mentioned in your opening statement a lot about education. You also wrote about it in a CBC article in which you talked about the healing process for indigenous and non-indigenous people and

the move forward. You also talked a lot about economic reconciliation, as Ms. Mbarki just mentioned. How do you see this playing out?

In your opening remarks, you talked about how you've been able to help move your community forward. Maybe tell us a bit about that and how important it should be here at the table when we examine Bill C-29.

**Chief Willie Sellars:** The most challenging thing in Indian country is that all of our communities are on different parts of their journey to healing.

When I look at WLFN and this big, bright light shining that we are an Indian country and that we've been able to spread our positivity throughout the region and get more and more allies to come online with us, I know it has been through a lot of hard work by our team.

We're a bit of an anomaly in this region, given the capacity that we have in-house to make the vision of council happen. We are a bit of an anomaly in our location in how we've been able to find that consistency in our leadership to continue to realize that vision of healing.

Again, I look at economics through reconciliation and our aspirations to get to be a self-governing community. That has been through the treaty process, but we've also taken these incremental steps to self-government. We are under the first nations land management regime. We are governing over our reserve lands. We have a financial administration law, so these sectoral forms of self-government have allowed us to move at the speed of business and become this machine that works efficiently and is able to make decisions, because the capacity that we have on board helps us negotiate these deals and these agreements and start these other businesses that we've been able to see a lot of success and prosperity with.

Where we're really struggling is with that educational component to our healing, creating allies surrounding us and having people jump on board and stand beside us and hold us up.

We've just seen a massive turnover at the local municipal government in our neighbouring community of Williams Lake. The mayor and four council positions were turned over in the latest municipal election. A big part of that, I think, is because people want to see change. There's this new era of change that I think is rippling out across this country, and there is no way to say that all of our first nation communities are in the same box. We have over 200 first nation communities in British Columbia alone, all different, but where we're seeing the consistencies is in our aspirations to be successful, our aspirations to become healthy, not only on the mental health side but also on that cultural, ceremonial and language side.

Of course, our aspirations are to make sure that we are also contributing to the overall vision of this country, which is everybody working together, and, by working together and acknowledging who the first nations people are in this territory that you're working in and learning the history of, educating yourself on why our communities are the way they are and the history of residential schools, and really holding up what reconciliation means.

We could really go on and on as we go down this big path—

• (1740)

**The Chair:** Thank you. I apologize for cutting you off. We have to keep to our schedule.

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

**Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** Thank you for that.

I want to start off with Chief Sellars.

Chief Sellars, you said that despite the economic success of your communities, you're still experiencing trauma, suicides, addiction. As someone who is from a Mi'kmaq community of 5,000 and has also seen successful Mi'kmaq communities, I've witnessed the same challenges.

There are those who would frame reconciliation as an economics thing and say that if they had enough opportunity, if they had enough money, somehow the harms caused through intergenerational trauma or through the loss of culture, through the loss of language, would not be as important. Do you agree that reconciliation requires addressing the harm created as well as creating pathways to prosperity?

**Chief Willie Sellars:** I agree 100%.

I have been in this politics game for some time now. I got elected in my early twenties. I sat on council for 10 years before becoming the chief in 2018 and I was acclaimed just this past summer, so I'm relatively young in this game. I have been able to learn and have my boots on the ground throughout this process. I just continue to think that as hard as it is to have a discussion around residential schools and the history of this country in regard to first nations peoples, it's a discussion we need to continue to have no matter how hard it is.

I sat in this Cultivating Safe Spaces training the other day with a young lady from the Syilx nation, Elaine Alec. One of the comments she made really resonated with me. She said that we're getting conditioned to continue to hear those stories about residential schools—a lot of us, anyway—and to hear these horrific stories about the St. Joseph's Mission. We're going through this investigation now. Now I'm conditioned not to react to them. I'm conditioned, it seems, not to cry or show emotion, but I'll be watching a commercial on TV and something will remind me of a story that I heard, positive or negative, and I'll break down and I'll start crying. I think about the hockey rink, for example, and I break down, and it was triggered because the only stories that I ever heard about the St. Joseph's Mission from my dad were about the hockey rink.

In dealing with these different triggers, they vary for people across this country and across our first nations communities, and there's again no one-size-fits-all solution to all these things. What

we need to do is to continue to educate the non-indigenous people of this country and keep the discussion at the forefront so that people will continue to be empowered to bring this up and share their stories so that they can heal themselves.

We want to break that generational gap that we're seeing in all of our communities. We want to break that cycle. I'd like to think the cycle is being broken with my three kids and my kid who is going to be born any day. We're due on Saturday. They are going to grow up in an era when their dad was there every single day of their lives, their mom was there every single day of their lives. That luxury is not the same and is not consistent across our communities.

How do we break that gap? How do we break that cycle? Education is going to be the biggest part of that, in my opinion, so that when I talk to the City of Williams Lake's mayor, he understands the history of first nations people and why it is so important for him to stand beside us and hold us up, not only in projects on the ground for economic reconciliation, but also in participating in the ceremonies and the events we're having in the community to show and prove that he's a leader and he's standing beside us and he's being that example.

• (1745)

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** Thank you for that answer, Chief.

Melissa, I want to go to you next.

You talked about the major gaps that exist between your community and the rest of Canada. The TRC calls to action talk about closing the gaps in education, health and access to justice. I wonder if you could speak to the importance of closing the gap between on-reserve and off-reserve as a fundamental step towards the oversight that needs to take place by the independent committee.

**Ms. Melissa Mbarki:** My community is actually an hour and a half from the nearest city. It's two and a half hours if we go north. It's very hard for community members to access even something as simple as a blood test. They have to drive for this. It is not easy for them to get out of the community to access things.

One of the things that we really learned during COVID was that we had very limited access to health services. We didn't even have access to isolation units. We couldn't take those who had COVID out of the family home so that they could isolate while they were sick. They infected an entire family. If you look at family structure on the reserve, you see that two or three different families could be living in one home. That really impacted us.

I think that's one of the things that we do have to bridge sooner rather than later, because if there is another pandemic, we're going to go through the same thing with the military coming out to help. We have to start looking at solutions to different situations like health.

Another thing is mental health services. Once again, they're two hours away. This shouldn't be happening. I'm in a community with four others around it, so it would be really easy to bring in one service that could be accessed by four communities. It doesn't necessarily mean that one community is going to get a health centre. We can all access and share these types of services, even mental health services. I think that's where bridging the gap comes into play, even with economic reconciliation. If we bring in jobs and a certain company, it encompasses the surrounding communities. It's not just available for one like mine; it could be shared. I think these are things that we definitely have to start thinking about.

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

[Translation]

Mrs. Gill, you have six minutes.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses, Ms. Eegeesiak, Ms. Mbarki and Chief Sellars. I'd also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Chief Sellars on the impending birth.

I'd like to go back to the bill.

What improvements do you think we should make? Since Ms. Mbarki and Chief Sellars are young Indigenous people—it was alluded to earlier—I'd like to know what youth-related elements they would like included in the bill.

My question is for all three witnesses, but I'd like Ms. Mbarki to answer first. Ms. Eegeesiak and Mr. Sellars can answer afterwards.

[English]

**The Chair:** Ms. Mbarki, did you get the translation? You're being asked to comment first.

**Ms. Melissa Mbarki:** No, I didn't get the translation. Sorry.

**The Chair:** Okay. We'll start over, then.

Do you have your interpretation button selected? It's the little globe at the bottom. If you hit that and choose "English"—if that's the language you want to hear it in—it will translate and give it to you in English.

[Translation]

Mrs. Gill, I'll reset the clock to zero.

Please repeat your question, Mrs. Gill.

• (1750)

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In fact, I'd like to thank the witnesses, Ms. Mbarki, Ms. Eegeesiak and Chief Sellars. I'd also like to congratulate Chief Sellars on the impending birth.

I'd like each of them to tell us about the improvements they'd like made to the bill.

Of course, we want concrete measures. We know there's a lot of work to do, and we want it to be done quickly.

Ms. Mbarki and Chief Sellars, as young Indigenous people, what do you want to see in the bill?

Ms. Mbarki, I'll ask you to answer my question first. Ms. Eegeesiak and Chief Sellars can answer it next.

[English]

**Ms. Melissa Mbarki:** One of the improvements that definitely can be made is creating sub-units under this act. We cannot address all of the issues in our communities under one sort of board. We need to look at it in separate parts, and we definitely need to address these different parts differently. We need a different road on each one, whether it's language and culture, education, economics or social programs like drug and alcohol addiction and treatment centres. I think separating these out would give us a better perspective on what is happening in each area.

What I fear is that one area is going to take precedence over another. If it's culture and language, that could take precedence over economic reconciliation. We really need to think about it in terms of what we want to do and how we're going to go about doing it, because having this all lumped into one is going to be chaos. How do you measure all of this? That's what I would like to see looked at and possibly changed.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** I'd like to ask Ms. Mbarki another question as a follow-up.

Do you think that if subcommittees are created, which is possible under the bill, the resources as presented will be enough?

[English]

**Ms. Melissa Mbarki:** That's one of the things these sub-units will address. Is one area getting more money than the other or is one area being neglected over another? There's no possible way that we can measure all of this under one umbrella, but if we start parsing it out and having different sub-units, we can definitely see the money invested in each and what the outcome is. It would be easier to measure, and it would give some accountability to the people and to indigenous communities.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Madame Eegeesiak, would you like to answer the question from Madame Gill, please?

**Ms. Josie Okalik Eegeesiak:** Sure. I will just repeat some of the stuff I said in my opening remarks.









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