



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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# Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 045**

Thursday, December 8, 2022

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Chair: The Honourable Marc Garneau





## Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

Thursday, December 8, 2022

• (1600)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Marc Garneau (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 45 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

We acknowledge that we are meeting on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

[Translation]

Today we are considering supplementary estimates (B), 2022-23.

First we have the Minister of Northern Affairs and his officials. They will be followed, in the second hour, by the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, accompanied by his officials.

[English]

I'd like to make a few introductory remarks.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking.

[Translation]

You have a choice at the bottom of the screen between the floor, English, or French. There may be questions in Inuktitut. So you may now select the language you prefer to hear.

[English]

I remind everyone that all comments should be addressed through the chair. For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. The clerk and I will try to respect the speaking order as well as we can, and we appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

With that, I would like to welcome the Minister of Northern Affairs, Minister Vandal, and his team.

You will have five minutes for your introductory remarks, and this will be followed by a question period.

We'll go over to you, Minister Vandal.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ):** Pardon me, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mrs. Gill.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** I raised my hand regarding the sound checks. We have a witness who is online, and I'd like to make sure the sound checks have been done.

[English]

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk, have we completed the sound tests for those who are on Zoom?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Vanessa Davies):** No, I didn't. We were waiting for the bells. I apologize, sir.

Mr. Walsh, can you hear me? We'll do a quick sound check.

**Mr. Wayne Walsh (Director General, Northern Strategic Policy Branch, Northern Affairs, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs):** Yes, I can hear you. Thank you.

**The Clerk:** Can I get the thumbs-up from the interpreter?

Mr. Walsh, can you tell me what the weather is like where you are?

**Mr. Wayne Walsh:** It's about 5°C and the sun is going down quickly, as it does at this time of the year.

**The Clerk:** I think we can hear you just fine. Thank you, Mr. Walsh.

I'm sorry about that, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Minister Vandal, if you are ready, you will have five minutes to make your introductory remarks.

Go ahead, please. The microphone is yours.

**Hon. Dan Vandal (Minister of Northern Affairs):** Thank you so much for the introduction, Mr. Chair.

I'm glad to be here today to discuss and answer questions about the 2022-23 supplementary estimates (B) for northern affairs.

Joining me today is Paula Isaak, associate deputy minister of CIRNAC; Georgina Lloyd, assistant deputy minister of Northern Affairs; and Darlene Bess, chief finances results and delivery officer.

CIRNAC's final supplementary estimates for 2022-23 reflect a net increase of \$6.3 billion, and of that, \$130.8 million is for northern affairs.

[Translation]

My department continues to work on a number of priorities together with Indigenous, territorial and Northern partners. One of the most pressing, and a significant part of these supplementary estimates, is addressing food insecurity across the North and Arctic, because everyone deserves access to affordable and healthy food, no matter where they live.

Much has been said about nutrition north over the last few weeks. I'd like to be clear: no one government program will address food insecurity on its own, which is why we are taking a whole of government approach.

New funding for Northern Affairs includes \$87.5 million for Northern Food Security, which was allocated through Budget 2021 and will allow the nutrition north Canada grant and contribution program to better support local food systems in communities across the North and Arctic.

[English]

This initiative also broadens the harvesters support grant with additional funding for the new community food programs fund to support food-sharing activities that include market, country and locally grown foods. Together, the harvesters support grant and community food programs fund mark a fundamental shift by empowering communities to determine their own food security priorities. These new measures were co-developed in full partnership and reflect the priorities of northerners.

[Translation]

With respect to climate change and cleaner energy, communities in the North and Arctic are seeing the effects of climate change at a much higher and drastic rate than in the rest of Canada. It's impacting the traditional way of life and more.

These estimates also include \$5.5 million to support flood mapping in First Nation communities in the North.

[English]

Many northern and Arctic communities have no choice but to rely on costly and polluting diesel to light and heat their homes. The estimates also include \$6.2 million of re-profiled contribution funding for clean energy projects in the north, allowing for "by the north, for the north" solutions in the transition to clean energy and reducing reliance on diesel. The two streams consist of \$2.2 million for community clean energy and \$4 million to support planning and feasibility for hydroelectricity and grid interconnection projects in the north.

Just last month, I travelled to Rankin Inlet and Iqaluit to announce our government's support for the feasibility and planning of the Kivalliq hydro-fibre link project, where we invested \$7 million, and the Iqaluit hydroelectric project, where we invested \$4 million. These important projects aim to get Rankin Inlet and Iqaluit off diesel and onto cleaner, more reliable energy.

• (1605)

[Translation]

As part of our efforts to clean up our environment, there is also \$1 million in new funding to begin collecting data to address plastic pollution in Northern environments.

There is also \$28.5 million being brought forward from the previous year for the Northern Abandoned Mine Reclamation Program to advance planned remediation activities in 2022-23.

This reprofile will support the reduction of risk to human health and the environment, and will ensure that affected communities see the social and economic benefits of these clean ups.

[English]

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to appear before you today and provide a summary of how these estimates will support Northern Affairs.

It's great to be here. *Qujannamiik*.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

We will now go to the period of questions.

[English]

We'll begin with the Conservatives and Mr. Zimmer for six minutes.

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

Thanks to the minister for appearing today.

I have an article in front of me from Nunatsiq News about housing in Nunavut, or, more specifically, the lack of housing in Nunavut. I was up there recently, as you probably know, Minister, and I heard there was an urgent need for many houses. Thousands are required.

Maybe I'll ask it this way, because you've seen them built and I haven't. How much housing has been built in Nunavut this year?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Since I became Minister of Northern Affairs, this is the issue that has come up most often in all my communications and consultations, both real and virtual. I know this is a priority for our government. We have several funding sources for housing. We have the national housing strategy, which is a \$70-billion policy over 10 years—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, Minister. I know about all the promises.

You made another commitment recently, but the question was, how many houses were built?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** In budget 2022, we established \$4.4 billion over five years, including \$800 million to be invested in—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, Minister—

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** —Inuit Nunangat alone. I was up in Gjoa Haven—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** The question was, how many? The answer is zero.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** That's absolutely not true. I was in Gjoa Haven in July—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** How many were built? That's the question I'm trying to get to.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** I don't have a precise number on how many were built, but I can tell you that there is construction going on as we speak. There is a lot of work to do because the deficits were huge. We are slowly chipping away at those deficits. Much more work needs to be done.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Minister, the article—

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** I can tell you that I was in Gjoa Haven—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** My time is very limited, so I'll quote the article in front of me, the one I was referring to: "Rising construction costs have cancelled or delayed critical infrastructure projects across Nunavut, the territory's legislative assembly heard Wednesday."

We heard that all housing projects were cancelled this summer because of increasing costs due to inflation. That's the question I want to get to. Why were they all cancelled?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** First of all, perhaps you'd let me finish. Can I answer?

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** My time is limited, Minister.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** My time is limited as well—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** I'm asking a simple question about how many.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** —and that's why I want to give you an answer.

I was in Gjoa Haven in late July of this year. Two fiveplexes in Gjoa Haven were near completion. They certainly were not cancelled. They will make 10 safe and affordable homes for families in the relatively small community of Gjoa Haven. That's a real project that's positive.

There is much more work to do. We completely acknowledge that. We are in conversations with the Premier or Nunavut on acceleration—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Let me keep going, Minister, with another question. I'd like to have a longer conversation, but time doesn't allow it today.

• (1610)

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Yes, of course.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** The next question is about the Arctic oil and gas moratorium.

Many northerners knew that as soon as the Liberal government took power, and this Prime Minister.... The territorial premiers all wanted to have a say, not necessarily that they wanted to develop oil and gas. However, the Prime Minister said there's a moratorium along the entire three territories, without consultation from any of the premiers.

Can you provide an update on the Arctic oil and gas moratorium? Is there going to be a change? We've seen certain extensions happen. Is it going to be there for the foreseeable future? At what point are you going to hand over those decisions so they are made by the territories themselves?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** First of all, establishing an indefinite moratorium for new Arctic offshore oil and gas in federal waters was the right thing to do. We have been working on five-year science-based reviews that focus on marine and climate change science in the Arctic and offshore Arctic. They are continuing. They will inform the next steps of Arctic oil and gas development.

We are in constant communication with Inuit rights holders and all three territorial governments on the moratorium. We are working on an accord that will focus on shared priorities and green alternatives for—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Regarding the decision to continue the moratorium, is it going to be indefinite? Is that what you just said?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** As always, we are basing our future decisions on science.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Then it's not going to be a decision that was.... I think the promise was that decisions were going to be given to the territories to make themselves, but I'll move on.

My last question is about home heating.

Northern families are worried about how they're going to get through this winter. Some families could be paying more than \$7,000 this year just to heat their homes. We've been in touch with a single mother who's working two jobs in the Yukon and was recently hit with an \$1,800 fuel bill to fill her tank to start the winter. That tank will have to be filled three more times before the winter is done. This is why we asked the Prime Minister in question period about removing the carbon tax on home heating. All we get back is that it's a luxury and that it needs to be taxed.

Minister, I think you know that heating a home to stay warm this winter is certainly not a luxury to northerners. Families literally have to make a decision between turning up the thermostat to stay warm and buying food.

What's your response to the removal of carbon tax on home heating?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** First of all, we are totally aware of the realities of Canadians and specifically northerners. It's important to note, as your party seems to not realize this, that the price on pollution does not cost Canadians anything. They are rebated the cost of the price on pollution in every territory and every province—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Minister, it's been proven that—

**The Chair:** Mr. Zimmer, your time is up, unfortunately. Let the minister finish answering the question and then we'll move on.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** We are completely aware of the affordability issues across our country. I'm happy to say that this is why we brought in \$10-a-day day care. I'm happy to say that Nunavut was the very first territory or province, as of December 1, to reach the \$10-a-day day care goal. That will save Nunavut families thousands of dollars over the next year. That's why we brought it in.

We brought in dental care for all Canadians. There are over 60,000 applications for help with dental care. That will help people all over the country.

Also, we indexed the Canada child benefit to inflation. That's putting literally thousands of dollars into the pockets of Nunavut families.

All three are initiatives that your party voted against.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The only reason I'm asking this is that the minister has referred to the number of houses that were built and he has documentation to show that. I think he's claiming that. I ask that he table it for the committee for us to study, because according to my records, zero have been built. I'd like him to table it and at least inform us of where those are being built and how many.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Could I respond to that?

**The Chair:** Yes, please.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** I answered that question. I didn't have a precise number for how many homes were built. I'm sure the public service could find you something in the days to come, but I don't have it.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister. I will ask you, if your ministry can, to provide that information to the committee, please.

• (1615)

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

With that, we'll go to Mr. McLeod.

**Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I welcome the minister and his team.

I'm listening to the housing discussion with a lot of interest. It's still a big issue in the north and all across the Arctic. I'm very happy with the investments that we've been seeing from our government in the last number of budgets.

In my previous life, I was the minister of housing for the Government of Northwest Territories. It was very difficult to access federal funding for housing. We did get a couple of million dollars from the government of the day, the Conservative government, but we got absolutely no indigenous housing money—not a penny. It wasn't until this government got into power that money started flowing from Indigenous Services into the Northwest Territories for indigenous housing.

Now we have rapid housing money flowing, co-investment funding for affordable housing and homelessness and, on top of that, the stream from Indigenous Services. I'm quite excited about that.

I'll give you the opportunity to give us an update on the progress made and on some of the work that has happened with the territorial governments and indigenous partners.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Thank you, MP McLeod.

First of all, in all the conversations I've had, I've said this is a priority. We fully understand the importance of it. We're also realistic as to the limitations of constructing in the territories, where the seasons are short and where, at the best of times, the cost of doing anything is elevated, especially during these difficult times with inflation. We're cognizant of that. Nevertheless, it's a priority.

Across the territories, every premier I have conversations with is working. We're working with them to put forward accelerated housing plans. We're doing this with Inuit rights holders, first nations and Métis communities, and I think there's progress being made. You can see it in your own territory. The last time I was in Yellowknife, you could see the construction going on and the dollars that were in the queue. Because of the short construction season and the supply chain issues, it is difficult for construction to keep up with the dollars that are allocated.

I've talked about my travels. I went on a 10-region tour over 12 days during the summer. I saw two five-unit constructions in Gjoa Haven, which I've mentioned. In Inuvik I saw a 14-unit construction that was almost finished. In Yellowknife, where I've met you many times, there must be dozens and dozens of new constructions under way now.

I can tell you that in Nunavut, we are working with housing corporations and with the government to accelerate the construction of many homes by 2030. The premier has been very creative in his partnerships and his funding. That's reflected in the budget.

Budget 2022 is investing \$4 billion to accelerate work in closing indigenous housing gaps, including \$2.4 billion for first nations housing, \$565 million to support housing in self-governing and modern treaty holder first nations communities, \$845 million to support housing in Inuit communities, \$190 million for Métis communities and \$34 million to four Métis groups in the Northwest Territories.

I can say that progress is being made. It's not fast enough; it's too slow. We acknowledge that. The gaps are as wide as this room, but we're slowly chipping away at them. What we need to do is continue investing for many more years to come, and that is certainly our plan.

• (1620)

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** It's quite exciting to see the number of units. I've lived in small indigenous communities, and I know there are at least 14 units hitting the ground. Seven of them are being retrofitted, and there are seven brand new ones coming up. That's just a small community. There is a lot of excitement. It's good to see that every indigenous government has received a funding commitment for housing in the Northwest Territories. I'm very happy about that.

I want to ask you a quick question on some of the devastating impacts of climate change. We are seeing communities flooded or starting to fall into the ocean or rivers because their banks are starting to erode. We need to do a lot to mitigate some of the impacts.

Maybe you could talk about what's being done or planned to try to mitigate some of the damage or impacts of climate change in our communities. How do we build a better environmental future in the north?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** That's a great question. It's absolutely a priority for our government. Everyone acknowledges the climate is warming faster in the north than in the south.

We have, in our budget, hundreds of millions of dollars for the co-development of an indigenous climate leadership agenda. We are moving forward on hydroelectric projects, such as the Iqaluit hydroelectric project and the Kivalliq hydro-fibre project in the Kivalliq area. There is the Taltson hydroelectricity expansion project in your territory, where we're having great discussions with the premier. Budget 2022 invested \$32.5 million for the Atlin hydro expansion project, which is first nations-led, in the Yukon.

Those are all real projects we are working on to lessen northerners' reliance on diesel. They're ambitious projects. They take time, but we are making the right moves to see them come to fruition.

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

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Mrs. Gill for six minutes.

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

I want to thank Minister Vandal for his testimony, as well as the entire team accompanying him.

I listened closely to Mr. Vandal, particularly when he discussed food insecurity in the north. It's a subject that people constantly talk to me about virtually everywhere I go. This insecurity, which he says is increasing, is also heightened by accelerating climate change and the incidents resulting from it.

He also referred to a whole-of-government approach. I would have liked to know exactly what he was referring to. It seems that food security doesn't just depend on his department, but on other departments as well. So I'd like to know exactly what he's referring

to, whether it's programs or something else, so we can have the necessary details to establish commitments in the estimates.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Thank you very much for that important question.

I can assure you that we're taking this seriously. Our department manages nutrition north Canada's programs, and I know that the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food has very important food security initiatives as well. We often speak with the minister's teams and the—

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** You're referring to Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau. What percentage does her department cover?

For example, you cited investments totalling \$87 million to expand funding for food security, but you say that also depends on other departments.

What can the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food do that your department can't?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** The Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food isn't linked to the nutrition north Canada program. Nutrition north Canada is a program of the Department of Northern Affairs, but I know that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada has its own food security initiatives.

• (1625)

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Are they also intended for the north, Minister?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Sometimes there are partnerships between north and west that benefit from the programs. I don't have a lot of details on that department because I'm not linked to it.

We can definitely provide you with more information after the meeting.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** That's actually what I'm interested in. You mentioned an all-of-government approach, which meant that other departments are involved. Without knowing what's going on in the north, for example, how can the other departments work in a complementary manner with what's being done by nutrition north, for example?

I was wondering how you assess needs when you don't know what others are doing. The estimates provide a certain amount of funding, but we don't exactly know what the others are doing elsewhere. How can we know if the work is satisfactory, or if it meets certain needs?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Food security is ultimately a poverty issue. Our government has many programs to assist all Canadians, including citizens of the north. There has to be affordability. I previously mentioned early childhood. Nunavut is the first of all the territories and provinces to create a \$10 a day early childhood program.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Quebec did that several years ago, Minister.

I find that interesting.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** There's dental care as well.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** I'm finding it hard to link all that to food insecurity.





[Inuktitut text interpreted as follows:]

I asked you this previously. Again, I ask you why it's never a rush or a priority or an emergency to you. Right now, you should look at this as a crisis situation and do something quickly about it. Why are you not asking us to support you with supplementary funding for housing?

We read the report that you read to us. We heard the report. Many of us see the importance of adding more resources financially. Why aren't you pleading with us to support you to produce more resources, to produce more housing?

[English]

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** First of all, it is a priority for us.

We are moving. We are investing dollars in the north as quickly as we possibly can. In fact, I dare say that we are investing them and moving them probably quicker than they can be absorbed by the local communities.

I can tell you that since 2016, Inuit have constructed nearly 500 new units, have repaired a number of existing units—

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** [Member spoke in Inuktitut as follows:]

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[Inuktitut text interpreted as follows:]

Again, I regret—

[English]

**Hon. Dan Vandal:**—and have undertaken critical land development work with distinctions-based investment. That's not enough—

**The Chair:** Please let the minister finish, Ms. Idlout.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** That is progress, but it's not enough. I am agreeing with you that we need to do more. We need to build capacity at the community level and at the territorial level. You know better than I do about the limitations—the short construction season, the supply chain problems, the inflation—but we are working.

We are working with the premier. We are working with rights holders. We are working with housing corporations to try to reduce the barriers and accelerate the construction. The only way this is going to get done is through partnerships.

I was very happy to learn—last week, I believe—that in Arviat, a modular housing plant is being planned. I think that's great news. I worked with the former premier on that when I was in Arviat. Ultimately, the answer is to build the capacity and the production ability in Nunavut and in other territories so that homes can be built there and skills can be learned.

It breaks my heart when I hear about homelessness and people dying in the cold weather, and I know I speak for everybody. We are trying to do better, but we are making small progress on a big, big problem.

● (1635)

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** [Member spoke in Inuktitut as follows:]

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[Inuktitut text interpreted as follows:]

Listen, you did not respond to my questions—

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Idlout. That's your time. You'll have another chance.

We're going to begin a second round. We'll start with Mr. Melillo for five minutes.

**Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here to answer our questions.

I want to go back to food security. I believe \$87.3 million has been allocated to support northern food security. I have a concern with the government's approach. According to all the information I can find, over the last number of years, each year funding has increased to address food security, with programs such as nutrition north, but each year in the northern parts of my riding, and of course the three territories, we see rates of food insecurity continuing to increase. The department is continuing to spend more and not necessarily getting more results from that.

I'm just wondering if you can tell us what more the government and your department are doing to work with communities on the ground to ensure that the dollars spent are actually achieving their targets.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** We are working with people who live in all of the various communities. We know that solutions from the north are better than solutions from Ottawa.

We've invested \$163 million of new money in food security initiatives in the north, including in a subsidy increase to nutrition north; a new community food program that's going to work on school programs; other food sovereignty initiatives such as building greenhouses and year-round hydroponic enclosures, which I have visited in my travels; and a hunters and trappers program, through which we encourage and financially help with country foods and traditional foods. Indigenous people helped us co-develop that.

Ultimately—

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** Can I ask a quick question?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Sure.

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** I'm pressed for time, Minister. I appreciate that.

Earlier on, you mentioned a bit about the consultation on that. Do you have any information you could provide us on how frequently communities in the north are consulted on those programs?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Well, we have a nutrition north advisory council, whose job is to represent the various communities. The north, as you know better than I do, is a vast area. We try to get representation from most of those areas on the advisory council of nutrition north. We work directly with indigenous nations on—

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** Thank you, Minister. I'm sorry, but I want to get to another question.

I want to emphasize that you said I know the north better than you. I really appreciate that. Thank you for that shout-out.

Minister, in June 2021, this committee completed a report on food security in the north. One concern we heard around nutrition north was that the mandate of the program wasn't really to make life more affordable. One recommendation—the third recommendation from that report—was for the program's mandate to be changed in order to improve food security outcomes in northern communities. I'm wondering if your department has taken action to change the mandate.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** We're constantly consulting with the advisory council and the various indigenous governments in the north.

On improvement, we have some funds available for actual data and research—

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** That's good, Minister. I'm sorry.

Has the mandate been changed? Has the all-party committee—

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** The mandate has been expanded. I've talked about the new community foods group we have to encourage food sovereignty initiatives from people who live in the north.

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** Is it explicitly within the mandate of nutrition north to alleviate food insecurity and make life more affordable for people in the north?

• (1640)

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** It's the mandate of our government to alleviate poverty, which is a direct cause of food insecurity.

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** Is it directly in the mandate of nutrition north? I understand that the government is working on it, and that's great.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Yes. I haven't read—

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** You don't know the mandate of the program you're in charge of?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** —de facto the mandate of nutrition north, but it's to alleviate food insecurity.

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** You haven't read the mandate of the nutrition north program. Is that correct? Is that what you just said?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** The purpose of nutrition north is to alleviate food insecurity.

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** Is that explicitly in the mandate? Can you confirm that?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** The mandate of nutrition north is to alleviate food insecurity.

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** Okay. Thank you. I'm sorry for the confusion. I think it would have been easier—

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** I wasn't confused. You were confused.

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** —if you'd said that from the get-go, Minister.

I think that's pretty much my time, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** You have about 10 seconds left, Mr. Melillo.

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** I don't think I can get much of an answer in 10 seconds.

Thank you, Minister, for your time.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Melillo.

Mr. McLeod, you have five minutes.

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

I'm listening to the discussion with very, very keen interest. There's a lot of focus in the supplementary estimates on what the department is doing to address food insecurity. This issue has been around for a long time. It's good to hear that there are new options out there. There are new investments for greenhouses and for hunters and trappers, and there's an expanded program, but I think it's going to take more than just one government to deal with food insecurity. It's also going to take more than just addressing some of these programs through nutrition north. It's going to take a whole-of-government approach. I've been saying this for a long time. I know you've heard me say it before.

Having roads that go to our communities would eliminate the need for nutrition north in a lot of them. We have quite a few communities that don't have roads yet. All the communities along the Mackenzie Valley Highway are not accessible by road. Many of them are only able to get freight by plane. Even then, because some of our runways are not long enough, the plane can land with only half a load. That's the same with passengers too, by the way. Landing and takeoff restrictions really impact us in the north.

When we talk about food insecurity and the cost of living, transportation infrastructure is a big part of it. Can you explain how the government has approached dealing with the cost of living in our small communities? How are we dealing with investment to build better accessibility in small communities?

We had an investment for the road to Whatì. That has been a game-changer for the community. People can get out of the community to go into the larger regional centres, and they can be back that same evening. The cost of living has gone down too, but there are other communities where you can't get out. You sometimes have only six weeks to get a new fridge or a new larger piece of merchandise. It's very challenging.

I'll give you some time to respond.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Thank you for that question. It's a very important one. It's at the heart of what we're trying to do.

We've talked a lot about housing. Infrastructure is the same thing. We need to invest more dollars with the territorial governments for things like road construction. We have budgetary items. We have the northern transportation initiatives, which have application-based funding envelopes for the different communities so they can apply for transportation corridor funding. I know that has shown some benefit in the past. We need to do more of that to make sure more communities have road access for transportation. You're absolutely right that this would be of great benefit given affordability and food security issues.

I agree with you that the road to Whatì was a game-changer, and I'm glad we were able to partner to get that done. That's front and centre in our platform and a constant part of our communications and consultations with the territories. We can't do this alone. The territories need to be driving it. They're the representation of the people who live there, along with indigenous governments.

We are absolutely committed to continuing the investment. We've made some progress, but there is a long way to go.

• (1645)

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

My last question is regarding—

**The Chair:** Mr. McLeod, you have about 30 seconds for the question and answer.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** Okay. I'll just ask the minister to speak a bit about how CanNor is benefiting the north, especially during the pandemic.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** We know that CanNor has been invaluable during the pandemic. It's the agency that provided relief not only for individuals but for businesses during the very difficult two years we all went through. It's been unprecedented. It is now playing a very significant part in the recovery by partnering, having ears to the ground and investing in businesses so they can grow and create jobs.

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

We'll now go to Madame Gill.

[*Translation*]

Go ahead for two and a half minutes, Mrs. Gill.

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

Minister, I'm going to continue with my questions on the funding granted to reduce food insecurity. I'd like to go back to the whole-of-government cooperative arrangement.

Was there a structure before a number of departments announced a cooperative arrangement to develop a plan, for example? One single year isn't long enough to resolve this issue.

Are any formal discussions under way among a number of departments, within a single structure, to answer the question that I hope should lead to a plan?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Yes, that's definitely one of our government's priorities, and I'm working closely with the Minister of Indigenous Services and the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations. The latter will be here later to explain how we can—

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Yes, but has he really—

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** He'll be here to explain how we can meet food challenges in difficult times, but also—

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Pardon me, Minister. I really have only two minutes, but that doesn't answer my question.

I'd like to know if there really is a structure, a formal roundtable, where a number of ministers and departments are meeting to develop a plan to reduce, or even defeat, food insecurity.

You said you were taking a whole-of-government approach, and, obviously, if you're responsible, you don't want that to be left to chance.

So is there a formal structure whose purpose is to resolve the issue?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** We're working closely with the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food and other departments, such as the Department of Transport and Infrastructure Canada, to address food security deficiencies. There's a lot of communication going on among us. Our teams are working closely with them to—

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Is there a formal structure, with a plan? Does that exist?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Yes, the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee is addressing all kinds of problems and difficulties, including food insecurity.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** But it isn't for everyone.

In other words, it isn't complete because it doesn't include everyone.

Thank you, Minister.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Gill.

We will continue with you, Ms. Idlout. You have two and a half minutes.

[*English*]

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** [*Member spoke in Inuktitut as follows:*]



That said, I now invite Minister Miller to make his introductory remarks for the next five minutes.

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

*Kwe kwe. Ulaakut. Tansi. Hello. Bonjour.*

I want to acknowledge that we are meeting on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

[*Translation*]

Today, I will give an overview of investments my government is making to ensure that Canada is honoring its lawful obligations to Indigenous Peoples and working to renew Canada's relationship with treaty partners and all Indigenous communities.

We also continue to work with other government departments to implement investments and policies that address the root causes of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

We will soon begin the engagement process with First Nations partners on redesigning the Additions-to-Reserve policy to ensure it's effective and inclusive. We are also working with First Nations to modernize the First Nations Fiscal Management Act, and are working closely with First Nations fiscal institutions and First Nations to ensure they have sufficient resources to further their visions for self-determination.

[*English*]

Crown-Indigenous Relations supplementary estimates (B) include initiatives totalling \$6.3 billion, which will bring the total budgetary funding for the department to approximately \$13.7 billion.

Roughly half of the estimates, \$2.9 billion, is funding for out-of-court settlements. These funds are used to advance reconciliation by paving the way for more respectful and constructive relationships with indigenous peoples.

These estimates also include \$673 million in new funding for the continued management of the indigenous childhood claims litigation, further supporting the compensation of survivors of physical and sexual abuse under the day school settlement agreement, as well as related administration costs for the day schools and sixties scoop settlement agreements. As of November 2 of this year, over 118,000 class action members have received compensation for the harms they suffered attending a day school, and 20,798 class action members have been deemed eligible for compensation for the harms they suffered related to the sixties scoop.

Additionally, the top-up of \$678 million in new funding in this fiscal year for the specific claims settlement fund ensures that funds are available for the timely payment of settlement agreements reached through the negotiations with first nations, or any compensation awards that are made by the Specific Claims Tribunal.

[*Translation*]

In parallel to our ongoing efforts to work with First Nations to resolve their claims expeditiously, we are working with the Assem-

bly of First Nations and other Indigenous partners on the joint development of reforms to improve the specific claims process.

In addition to reform efforts, we are striving to address the lack of housing for Indigenous communities, which has been a long-standing crisis. Our partners have informed us of their urgent need for safe and sustainable housing options for their communities.

[*English*]

New funding of \$458 million was provided through budget 2022 to improve and expand indigenous housing and infrastructure for self-governing and modern treaty first nations, Inuit and Métis. This funding extends and enhances the distinctions-based housing strategy work that's already under way, such as the Métis nation and Inuit Nunangat housing strategies. This investment helps to address the critical housing needs of indigenous partners and supports better health and socio-economic outcomes overall.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair, the funding included in the Supplementary Estimates (B) will further support the department as we work to deliver on our mandate and priorities.

[*English*]

I appreciate the opportunity to discuss these estimates with the committee. I'm happy to now proceed to questions.

*Meegwetch. Qujannamiik. Marsi. Thank you. Merci.*

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

We will now go to questions, starting with the Conservatives.

I give the floor to Mr. Schmale or Mr. Zimmer for six minutes.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for appearing. It's always a pleasure to have you here.

Minister, a few hours ago, the AFN came out against Bill C-21. Will you be supporting the AFN's call for amendments to be made?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** First and foremost, I think we can acknowledge that it is entirely within their discretion to come out with that type of resolution. Clearly we've heard from partners. I have heard from partners about concerns with respect to Bill C-21 as recently as today and yesterday, particularly in side conversations I had at the AFN. That's work we will do with indigenous partners. The Prime Minister and Minister Mendicino have also signalled that, and they look forward to that engagement.

We know that long rifles in particular are used to sustain hunting practices and for food initiatives and sustainability. That's work we'll be doing.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Will you be advocating for the AFN's position at the cabinet table?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** What I say around the cabinet table remains private, as you know, MP Schmale. I do voice concerns freely and openly, as my duty to indigenous peoples demands.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Just on a different topic, the estimates show that almost 93% of executive-level employees in your department received a performance bonus in the 2021-22 fiscal year. According to an Order Paper question, the criteria included individual results for executives rather than having bonuses based on how well the department performs.

According to the criteria, it seems they're based on the individual's results. I'm not sure how many organizations work that way. Should they not be based on the department's success rather than on an individual's success?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** I'll pass the substance of the question over to my deputy minister.

This is an independent public service. I will, however, defend to the bone the work my department has done, as well as the work Indigenous Services Canada has done, to keep indigenous people safe throughout COVID.

I'll let the substance of the question be answered by my deputy minister.

**Mr. Daniel Quan-Watson (Deputy Minister, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs):** There are two parts to the performance agreements, one of which follows from requirements from the clerk to the entire deputy minister community. The requirements then flow down into performance agreements for employees in individual departments. Then, yes, each director or each executive has a set of criteria that they are measured by and that they are required to meet. I'm responsible for all of those.

It's not accurate to say that 93% got a bonus. They got performance pay, but the biggest chunk of that every single year is to people who are deemed to have met the requirements that were set out for them. They get the amount that is for meeting their requirements, not necessarily for having exceeded—

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** However, these are personal requirements, not departmental requirements. Is that correct?

**Mr. Daniel Quan-Watson:** Well, they're departmental in the sense that as a deputy minister, I decide ultimately what those are

and whether or not they have met them in the furtherance of the objectives of the department.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** It says here in this Order Paper question that "Individual performance pay holds executives accountable for individual results and is not related to Departmental Results, which measure organizational goals."

**Mr. Daniel Quan-Watson:** I hold them to account for the portion that they're required to do, and they have done that. However, as the deputy head, I am responsible for the performance of the department as a whole. Each of them is responsible for their portion, as I assign it to them, for the course of the year and the performance over that period of time.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** The department is still not meeting its goals, so should we not be shifting those performance criteria?

**Mr. Daniel Quan-Watson:** It does change each and every year, depending on the circumstances. As things are completed, we exchange them. As we find that things need to be repeated, we sort of repeat and amplify those things.

However, many of the things we set out to do we did in fact do, so that's recognized in there as well. There are an awful lot of things we set out to do that we in fact accomplished over the year.

• (1710)

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Okay. I want to move back to the minister, because I know my time is short here.

Minister, unfortunately, we don't have the indigenous services minister here. It's the third-largest department, with 10% of overall government spending. It's actually almost doubled its spending in the last year. It's unfortunate that she wasn't able to be here.

I want to ask you about some of the information here in the estimates, specifically around what the Auditor General came out with a few weeks ago regarding funding for mitigation and adaptation and specifically indigenous-led projects that would help give indigenous communities a fighting chance to stay on their land in the event of extreme weather occurrences.

It says here in the estimates that there's about \$12 million. Has that been spent? Has any been spent, and are you expecting more than just \$12 million? If you're talking about bridges, dikes and culverts, that's barely enough to address the problem.

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Are you speaking about my estimates or Minister Hajdu's estimates?

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** I'm speaking about Minister Hajdu's, but given the fact that her numbers are so big—

**Hon. Marc Miller:** But I'm here, so you're asking me the question.

Look, I had the honour of serving that department for two years during COVID, deploying extraordinary measures to keep people safe during a particularly difficult time in our history that we're still feeling the effects of.

What we've seen through that is that there are massive socio-economic gaps that need to be closed, so that increase is, in my mind, entirely justified. It's keeping people safe and alive. In the cases of flooding and fires, we know that indigenous communities are disproportionately exposed, partly because Canada placed them in swamps and areas in flood zones and has exposed them to it.

We can talk about climate change, which is increasing that vulnerability, but there's a role that Canada played, and we see that in some of the settlements that I have.... We've seen that with the flooding of Peguis, for example, just earlier this year.

We're not doing enough, and I think Minister Hajdu has acknowledged that. We will have to do even more if we don't start moving into mitigation projects, and clearly they are underfunding. Otherwise, we'll spend the money on the back end, as we've seen through the fire season and through the flood season.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Exactly. I think that's what the Auditor General pointed out.

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** There are 112 infrastructure projects that would deal with adaptation and mitigation that are not being approved. In fact, it's a 6:1 savings. You can save six dollars for every dollar invested in adaptation and mitigation. That, again, goes to my question—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Schmale. Unless the minister wants to respond rapidly to what you've just said, the time is up.

**Hon. Marc Miller:** I'm not going to pretend to disagree with, perhaps, where you were going. I can't presume what the question was, but clearly we need to invest more in mitigation. It is clear as day, and it's only going to get worse if we can't tackle climate change in a mature way.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Schmale.

We'll now go to Ms. Atwin for six minutes.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, to you and to your team for appearing today for this very important discussion.

I'd like to acknowledge that last night we had a really important take-note debate on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls in this country. There are so many issues we can focus on that can better support indigenous women and girls, but I think housing is specifically one that is just so important. It's a social determinant of health, as we know.

Minister, our government has previously noted that investments in first nation housing, including self-governing and modern treaty partners, play a role in closing the infrastructure gap and the socio-economic gap in indigenous communities by ensuring their needs are met.

Can you please speak to how the government ensures these projects address the needs of the communities and involves them in the process?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Yes. Often, infrastructure projects, as well-meaning as they are, just kind of drop on people, and the support

and the capacity aren't there. What we do is as important as how we do it.

We know that with respect to missing and murdered indigenous women and girls the lack of housing is driving people into a precarious position of being vulnerable, and we know that it will continue to do so if we don't continue to tackle it through successive budgetary cycles.

That includes on-reserve housing that is adapted for women and children who are fleeing violence. That includes more housing generally, and it includes shelters and homes off reserve. We've often tended to silo our action in the quote-unquote on-reserve reality. It hasn't been sufficient, and it certainly hasn't represented what our ultimate responsibility is: to keep people safe in this country. Obviously what we've seen over the last few weeks is further evidence that as governments we continue to fail indigenous women and girls.

I was able to see this summer some really great investments by some of the modern treaty holders who are specifically targeting housing for women and girls who are fleeing violence in an on-reserve scenario. It's great to see it, because it's not just homes that they're building, which is important in and of itself, but homes adapted to people who need that safety and security and wraparound support. That violence is a legacy of our history in Canada, and it's ongoing.

The final report into murdered and missing indigenous women and girls outlined some substantive steps we need to keep following as Canadians, as the federal government, that don't touch necessarily the single moment where a traumatic tragedy occurs and all the steps leading up to the point where someone was put in that vulnerable position. We wish that it could have been solved in the snap of a finger, but we know that it can't.

We need to fix the ongoing tragedy of children in care and the overincarceration of indigenous women. It all ties into what the report has said, which is that we need to approach this in a systemic fashion, or else we will just continue patching it tragedy by tragedy.

I thank you for your presence last night, MP Atwin. I know that this is deep and profound for you, and I know you didn't have to be there, but I appreciate your remarks as well.

Thank you.

● (1715)

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Thank you very much for that response.

Another really impactful piece is supporting cultural spaces and the revitalization of languages.

We heard from indigenous partners and communities—and you did as well—that cultural spaces are critical to promoting those indigenous cultures and identities while fostering safe and secure communities for indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people.

Can you speak to how investments in cultural spaces help advance the calls for justice and the calls to action?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Call to justice 2.3 specifically called on the government to fund infrastructure projects for safe spaces for women and girls and 2SLGBTQI+ persons. Over the last year or so, we have been able to deploy about \$100 million into that infrastructure. That covers over 65 projects. The envelope and the subscription to it were oversubscribed by a factor of nine. For the purposes of this response, whether they were eligible projects or ineligible projects, depending on the criteria, is relatively immaterial, but it shows the need to continue to invest in safe spaces.

What does that look like? Well, in some cases, it's a longhouse in Gwa'sala-Nakwaxda'xw, which has some of the most impressive house posts that I've ever seen. I'm an east coaster, so maybe that isn't as impressive to MP Weiler, who has probably seen a lot more than I have. What it will do is honour a commitment we made 50 years ago to the community when it was displaced, and it was never honoured.

The final report underscored the vulnerability of people who are not able to reconnect with their culture, their ways and their language. This marvellous project, which will be about \$6 million or \$7 million, will allow communities to build their governance and have a safe space for those who are vulnerable in the community and ultimately keep them safe.

Sadly, I can't guarantee that if those projects had been in place years ago, they would have kept these people safe, but I know that they will keep people safe. I'm not so arrogant as to presume that the four women—we were horrified by the discoveries in what is a trash site—would have been affected by this. That's not the nature of my answer, but we do know that those investments need to occur as well in urban settings to keep people safe. That needs to continue, and that's work we'll do across all levels of government.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Thank you so much, Minister.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Atwin. Six minutes go by quickly.

[Translation]

You now have the floor for six minutes, Mrs. Gill.

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

I would also like to thank Minister Miller and the whole team with him today for answering our questions.

Mr. Miller, you just mentioned the urban settings issue. I wanted to draw your attention to that subject. Since we meet with the Indigenous communities, we know that many young and not so young people are drawn to the cities. There's really an ongoing population transfer from the communities and reserves to the urban areas. I think 45% or 50% of the Indigenous population in Quebec currently live in urban areas. The number may be as high as 80%.

I know you aren't the Minister of Indigenous Services any more, but I'm absolutely certain you have some knowledge of its budget.

What percentage of the budget can be used to support Indigenous people who live in urban areas, for housing, health services and so on, in short, for all their needs? I'm thinking of housing, for example.

• (1720)

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Thank you.

The percentages that you cited of the population living in urban areas or off reserve don't surprise me. They may be higher in certain parts of the country. Those numbers, in Quebec, don't surprise me.

Federal and provincial areas of jurisdiction are obviously a sensitive matter. Sometimes when we discuss Quebec, jurisdictional issues are fiercely debated on the backs of Indigenous peoples. However, I'm not claiming the federal government wouldn't have failed to meet its obligations absent this sensitive issue with Quebec because we see it all across the country.

As you very well know, the Canadian government's normal investments are made on the reserves, and it's making increasing numbers of investments. I'm referring, in particular, to targeted housing investments for Indigenous peoples worth many hundreds of millions of dollars. But I agree that's not enough.

Investments are being made in Val-d'Or and Montreal, for example. The organizations don't always have enough funding, and Quebec will also have to invest. I know it's doing that, but a very frank and open discussion of jurisdictional issues will be required, one that's still being conducted on the backs of Indigenous peoples both on and off reserve.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Indigenous friendship centres, for example, are requesting predictable, recurrent funding. As regards the plan, I understand that this is a shared jurisdiction.

In short, the needs are increasing. We know there's a real demographic boom going on in the communities, which is why I mentioned young people earlier.

If conventional funding isn't added for the indigenous friendship centres, shouldn't it be raised beyond current levels?

There's nothing in the estimates concerning this. I know you mentioned COVID-19. The present situation is quite difficult. I don't want to mention inflation. That affects the entire population, especially people living in precarious conditions.

Wouldn't there be some openness here to adding something to assist these people who are living in urban areas?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Yes, there is some openness. I met with the same group as you today. I know those individuals very well. Among other things, they mentioned the extraordinary work they did during the COVID-19 pandemic with the funding of Indigenous services to ensure that people stayed alive and healthy with vaccine and food distributions for seniors living in urban settings.

They did an outstanding job. At the same time, they also revealed something that we should have known: those needs are desperate.







**Hon. Marc Miller:** I can give you the general breakdowns. I don't have the rest—the legal fees and such.

• (1735)

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** That's fine.

**Hon. Marc Miller:** For Blueberry River, it's \$252.6 million. For Doig River, it's \$235.5 million. With respect to the Halfway River and West Moberly first nations, it is divided equally between the two.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** You said you didn't have any specifics about whether it is going to administrative fees, etc. Without that specificity, can you at least break it down topically? Where is that money going?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** The vast majority of this compensation is for the claim that we resolved.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Is it earmarked? Is a certain amount for legal fees or administrative fees, and then a certain amount goes to band members, or is it not that specific?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** I'll speak generally, because the communities decide how they distribute it. When they do these ratification votes, they will have a scheme and a proposal, and they'll deliver according to that. Obviously, people want to see results on the ground, so there's usually a distribution. Sometimes it doesn't happen. Then there is a reserve for final...through whatever trust mechanism they have for future investments.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** That maybe goes to my last question, but it begs a few more. Are any mechanisms put in place by these communities to monitor how these funds will be spent?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** They have their own governance systems, and we respect that.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** That brings up another question. We've had different discussions about different first nations communities in my area and about how, at times, the government is standoffish when it's being called upon to help, to assist and to govern, as is the job of the federal government, done in co-operation with the local first nation.

There's been a standoffish approach, even though they've been looking for help and looking for answers. We know personal examples, which I've brought to you, and the government has said, "Look, we're not going to get involved."

This brings up a concern. From the community members' perspective, they want to see that this is done responsibly and that it will actually land in the places where it needs to land. I'm not getting any kind of new assurance that a mechanism is in place and that this will be done in such a way that a clear light is shone on how that money is going to be spent in the communities.

**Hon. Marc Miller:** I think you'll agree with me, being a representative of the government that was sued, that we shouldn't dictate the terms—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** I agree.

**Hon. Marc Miller:** —of the compensation. We wouldn't do that with respect to any community that you represent.

We have to tread a very fine line. The Indian Act is very heavy-handed. People like me, in the past, have intervened too aggressive-

ly with devastating social repercussions. Sometimes it's been with evil intentions and sometimes with other intentions. That's the arena we're in.

The issue is really to trust communities—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** I think all communities are asking for is some accountability over where the money is going. This money has been allocated and that should be accounted for, and that's—

**The Chair:** Excuse me for interrupting. There are about 10 seconds left.

Give a quick answer and then we'll go to Mr. Battiste.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** I appreciate that. I think that's what the will of the community is. I hope there will be accountability in how this is done.

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Yes. Everybody loves accountability.

I'm going to celebrate this with them, because it's long overdue. It's very important. Obviously you want to see results hit the ground.

I know we've had separate discussions on this. My role as Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and my prior roles in Indigenous Services Canada are roles I've had to play very judiciously, hoping that I'm not intervening in areas where we've been too heavy-handed.

I get your point, but I think at the outset we have to start trusting each other a little better, particularly when we're the ones being sued and we're the ones who haven't paid the bills.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Zimmer.

Mr. Battiste, you have five minutes.

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

I think it's important to reflect on where we are in this country in terms of indigenous issues.

I've been going to the Assembly of First Nations Special Chiefs Assembly gathering that's been happening in Ottawa for more than 20 years. First, it was as part of the Assembly of First Nations Youth Council and then as a proxy. I spent some time as a regional chief too.

I remember that during the whole time I was on the youth council and was a regional chief, there was only one minister for all indigenous issues, including all of the things that are ISC-related today, that are Crown-indigenous-related today and that are northern issues.

We've seen, over the past few years, a real dedication from our ministers in making themselves visible during these meetings with the Assembly of First Nations. We are seeing all the ministers take time to meet with the different caucuses. At one time, there was only one minister who had to handle this huge responsibility.

Minister Miller, one of the responsibilities under Crown-Indigenous Relations is reconciliation. I think Canadians really woke up to the realities of the need for reconciliation with the discovery of children's bodies in several places, including in Kamloops and Saskatchewan. We're in the process of getting to the truth of just how many children went missing during the time of the residential schools.

I'm wondering if you could talk to us a bit about the progress we're making on the reconciliation file, especially with the calls to action around the burial grounds. They're calls 72 to 76, I believe. Could you talk to us about some of the money we've put out from coast to coast to coast to get to the truth, help indigenous families and communities find closure and help them reconcile with the dark history of Canada?

• (1740)

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Thank you, MP Battiste.

Something has just come to my attention. MP Idlout will appreciate hearing this, as indeed all members will. My understanding is that operations at the site in question—at the dump site—have been paused by the mayor and Premier Stefanson. This is good news. I believe this is what families have been asking for. That is positive news, and we'll see what happens next.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** I hate to interrupt, Minister. I have limited time for that question.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Hon. Marc Miller:** I don't want to take too long with my answers, MP Battiste.

About 96 projects are under way across the country to search those former sites. I've had the opportunity over the last year or so to visit about 20 sites across the country. Each has unique stories and survivors who have suffered unspeakable horrors, some speaking for the first time, some still suffering in silence. That space we still have to recognize and honour.

The reality is that this will take years to figure out. Closure comes in many forms. It comes in being able to speak about it, or it comes in being able to trace a long-lost loved one. That means a lot of money and investment from the Government of Canada.

You tend to think that radar searches are where you see the financial pressure. That isn't the case. They're relatively cost-effective. The real work is working with survivors in communities, having community gatherings and having healing sessions. Obviously, there are going to be long-term infrastructure asks that we will have to work with communities to do. It isn't every community that wants to do a search. There are traditions and views that say you leave the space lying as it is and do not touch anything. There are others that differ wildly from that.

When you talk about a place that kids have been dragged to from different communities with different protocols, you can imagine that communities are reeling and trying to figure out what the best protocol is to engage people. That is time-intensive. It is also re-traumatizing, but it goes to that process of accountability and closure that people are trying to figure out. Accountability may very well mean bringing someone to trial. Accountability may mean try-

ing to find out where your loved one was lost so that you stop blaming someone else for their disappearance. There are specific examples of that that have been shared with me in confidence. Each of them is unique, and each of them has to be honoured and re-searched.

I would finally highlight—so I don't dig into your second question—that the funding of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation for the next few years and the investment in a new building are so key to making sure that survivors have a focal point where they can go, consult and get documentation so they can get that information and perhaps closure. That is outside the control and purview of the federal government, which obviously they still have some healthy mistrust towards.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** Thank you, Minister.

That's all I have.

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

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Gill, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

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

Minister, earlier you said we would ideally resolve the Indigenous housing shortage in the communities by 2030. That's in eight years, but we could just as easily say it's tomorrow.

We've often reiterated the fact that, in Quebec alone, we would have to spend \$3.9 billion to build 10,000 units. For Canada as a whole, we're talking about nearly \$40 billion for 120,000 units. I would point out that this only represents the shortfall.

In Quebec, 225 units of this type are currently being built every year. If we did a calculation to give us an idea, we would have to build 1,250 units. We would have to multiply funding by a factor of five just to cover the shortfall, and I'm not even talking about inflation, additional costs, delays or additional units that we will need.

I'm speaking generally, but I know the issue is more complex than that. In light of this information, and even considering more details and subtleties, can we admit that we won't be able to meet the 2030 target despite the amounts that have been invested? We simply can't do it.

• (1745)

**Hon. Marc Miller:** There are obviously some challenges, and it may involve much larger amounts than those you've stated. In the past few years, we've tried to determine the exact size of the infrastructure shortfall, particularly in housing. It's enormous. It could well exceed \$40 billion, regardless of inflation. We have a target for 2030, but it will be hard to meet. The problem won't be entirely solved in one budget cycle, but all governments, regardless of political affiliation, will have to invest in housing.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Does that mean your government may increase funding to offset the shortfall? We already know we can't do it. I wasn't talking about infrastructure generally; I was referring solely to housing based on the investments I outlined.

Will you increase funding by a factor of five this year? That's the amount that will be necessary or else the effects of underfunding will be cumulative.

Are you going to increase funding so we can meet the target?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** I obviously can't discuss the next budget, but the reality is that we'll have to put our shoulder to the wheel.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Gill.

[*English*]

We have Ms. Idlout for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** Thank you.

I'm going to ask my question in English. We all know that food insecurity is a major issue, and I see that Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada is requesting \$87.3 million to support food security in the north.

What are your two departments going to do to make sure that these funds don't just go into the pockets of for-profit corporations that are showing record profits, and that they actually go into the mouths of people who need to be fed by this program?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** That's really an interesting question. You probably heard Minister Vandal's answer on nutrition north as well as some of the supports through COVID that have supported country food. I saw some amazing stuff going on in Inuvialuit in particular over the summer to keep people safe and get them good, nutritious food.

I don't think we should be afraid to speak publicly about the fact that we need to have a rethink and perhaps a means testing of some of the investments we're doing to keep healthy and nutritious food going into the north and, in particular, the Far North. I don't have the answers to that just yet. I think it's going to take a lot of work with rights holders to come up with a plan that's a little smarter than nutrition north.

Nutrition north works in different ways. It certainly needs more money, but the reality is that someone making a lot of money can get the same type of rebate that someone with less means can, and I don't think that's necessarily fair. I'm not launching a revamp of nutrition north from the committee, but I think we need to put some thought into that because it isn't working at the height at which it needs to work in order to keep people properly fed.

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** Yes. I've been asking questions about how this program is monitored and evaluated. It seems that with the way it is done, the for-profit corporations are monitoring themselves.

What will this government do to make sure that this practice of them monitoring this program is changed so that the government is monitoring the program?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** The deputy minister knows a bit more about the advisory committee related to nutrition north. It would probably be helpful to have him answer.

**Mr. Daniel Quan-Watson:** Thank you for the question.

Yes, there is an advisory committee with all relevant players. In fact, most of the major changes that we did recently were at the suggestion of ITK and NTI. We work with those external players. They are the ones who recommended the harvesters grant, for example, and they're the ones who made the recommendations on the bannock list. They're very much at the core of who is driving an awful lot of the conversation about the program.

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** That still doesn't answer my question about how the monitoring of monies for those for-profit corporations is working. Nobody is monitoring the corporations and how they are using nutrition north. That's what I was asking about. How will this government monitor it so that it's not the for-profit corporations monitoring the use of this \$87 million?

• (1750)

**The Chair:** Please answer very quickly if you want to comment on that. Otherwise, we'll have to stop.

**Mr. Daniel Quan-Watson:** There is a robust monitoring process in place that involves a number of parties, not just the companies themselves.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

With that, we'll bring our panel to a close.

Thank you very much, Minister Miller, for appearing with your team today to answer questions in the context of the supplementary estimates (B).

Just before I ask for adjournment, I'll say that on Monday, colleagues, we'll be starting our study of the Indigenous Languages Act.

With that, I request that we adjourn.

**The Clerk:** There's unanimous consent to adjourn, sir.

**The Chair:** Therefore, we are adjourned.





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