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—
Chair

The Honourable MaryAnn Mihychuk

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• (0830)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.)): Good morning. Welcome, Minister.

We are the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, the 42nd Parliament. Pursuant to standing order 81(4), main estimates 2019-20, vote 1 under Canadian High Arctic Research Station, votes 1, 5, 10, L15, L20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50 and 55 under the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, and votes 1, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, 60 and 65 under the Department of Indigenous Services Canada be referred to the committee on Thursday, April 11, 2019.

Before we start, we always recognize that we are on the unceded territory of the Algonquin people. Four hundred years ago when settlers arrived, our indigenous members welcomed Canadians—the foreigners, the settlers—to Canada and have continued to be patient and understanding. Unfortunately, we've seen that their generosity has been met with apartheid, genocide and programs that have really hurt their people.

We have change in the winds, with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Yesterday we received the report on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. It was an extensive review, with many challenges and changes recommended. We look forward to being part of the positive change, to change our legacy as Canadians and take positive steps on reforming what has been a dark history.

Welcome to the minister and all department staff. We appreciate your being here. I know that the minister has opening remarks and that members have questions.

Go ahead whenever you're ready, Minister.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations): Thank you, Madam Chair. It's great to be back. As always, thank you for the land acknowledgement as we meet here as a committee on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

[Translation]

I'm joined by Diane Lafleur, associate deputy minister; and Paul Thoppil, chief finances, results and delivery officer.

[English]

That's a really nice title, Paul.

I'm here to speak to the main estimates for Crown-Indigenous Relations as well as on behalf of my honourable colleague Minister Leblanc, who is responsible for northern affairs. We hope he will be well and back with us soon.

As you know, in August 2017 the Prime Minister announced the dissolution of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada and the creation of two new departments, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, and Indigenous Services Canada. Indigenous and Northern Affairs was a vestige of the colonial era. It was completely unsuited to support and partner with indigenous people based on their unique histories, circumstances and aspirations. The two new departments are designed and organized to better serve the needs of indigenous peoples and structured to better support first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples in implementing their visions of self-determination.

The Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, the department for which I'm responsible, has been advancing forward-looking and transformative work to create a new relationship with indigenous peoples as well as support the self-reliance, prosperity and well-being of northerners.

[Translation]

I'm pleased to appear on my department's main estimates, which total \$7 billion.

[English]

This year's main estimates reflect a net increase of \$3.9 billion, or 126%, compared to last year. The increase is primarily attributable to the inclusion of \$933.9 million for budget 2019 investments, as well as the following major items: an increase of \$2 billion for the childhood claims settlement; an increase of \$750 million for the sixties scoop settlement; and an increase of \$141 million for infrastructure projects in indigenous communities, including solid waste and Inuit housing.

• (0835)

[Translation]

Budget 2019 investments are reflected in the department's main estimates under separate votes. As their Treasury Board submissions are approved, departments will be able to access funds from these votes for their investments.

[English]

These investments build upon the government's historic investments of \$16.8 billion through three previous budgets to achieve the shared priorities of indigenous peoples in Canada, now totalling more than \$20 billion of new funding.

Across the country, indigenous leadership, non-indigenous Canadians and the government are working in partnership to improve the quality of life for first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Together we are making progress.

Budget 2019 makes significant new investments that support indigenous peoples' plans for self-determination and their work of rebuilding.

[Translation]

These include concrete measures to remove impediments to reaching agreements that affirm indigenous rights and address past grievances.

[English]

The budget also includes investments to support the government's continued progress in implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action.

Budget 2018 ended the practice of funding comprehensive claim negotiations through loans and replaced them with non-repayable contributions. Budget 2019 goes even further by including funding of up to \$1.4 billion to forgive all outstanding comprehensive claim negotiation loans and to reimburse indigenous governments that had already repaid these loans. More than 230 indigenous communities will immediately benefit from having these loans off their books or reimbursed. This will allow them to take advantage of opportunities that were out of reach, and to focus on investing in their priorities, such as governance, infrastructure and economic development.

Budget 2019 also replenishes the specific claims settlement fund for another three years, and increases the funding for specific claims research by \$8 million per year for five years. These investments will support the resolution of claims more efficiently and effectively, so we can move forward together in a good way.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action provide all Canadians a path forward for Canada's journey of healing and reconciliation.

[Translation]

Our government is working with its partners to accelerate progress on the 94 calls to action and has made significant progress on the calls to action under federal or shared responsibility.

[English]

I am very proud of the significant investments made by budget 2019 specifically through our department to support further progress on implementation. Budget 2019 provides \$126.5 million in 2020-21 to establish the National Council for Reconciliation and endow it with its initial operating capital, which addresses calls to action 53 to 55.

To address calls to action 72 to 76, the budget invests \$33.8 million over three years to develop and maintain the national

residential school student death register, and to work with parties to establish and maintain an online registry of residential school cemeteries.

The budget provides \$9.1 million over three years to support the construction of an indigenous legal lodge at the University of Victoria, and \$10 million over five years in support of indigenous law initiatives across Canada. Through the justice partnership and innovation program, these investments support the implementation of call to action 50.

The budget supports call to action 66—this is one of my favourites—with \$15.2 million over three years for an indigenous youth pilot program, delivered by the Canadian Roots Exchange. Funding will support the establishment of a distinctions-based national network of indigenous youth to help ensure that the Government of Canada's policies and programs are informed by the diverse voices of indigenous youth, and provides support to community events and gatherings for indigenous youth and reconciliation-focused, community-based indigenous youth activities.

The budget also provides \$10 million over two years advancing call to action 80 to support communities to recognize and commemorate the legacy of residential schools on the proposed national day for truth and reconciliation.

Our government also understands that success will require taking a truly whole-of-government approach to the TRC's calls to action. I can assure you that every department is taking up the challenge to advance the calls to action in their areas of responsibility. For example, just last week, Minister Hussen introduced the change to the oath of citizenship, which responds to call to action 94.

● (0840)

[Translation]

Our government has been working with northerners and indigenous and territorial partners to build strong, diversified, sustainable and dynamic Arctic and northern communities.

[English]

Budget 2019 invests over \$700 million in new and focused funding over 10 years to ensure that Arctic and northern communities continue to grow and prosper. Additionally, territorial formula financing transfers will total over \$3.9 billion in 2019-20.

Budget 2019 investments, through Northern Affairs, include three important initiatives: cleaning up the largest and highest risk contaminated sites in northern Canada; supporting diversified post-secondary education options in the north; and building connections in Canada's Arctic and northern regions. We are committed to co-developing initiatives for the north with northerners and making the necessary investments to support those co-developed solutions.

[Translation]

I look forward to discussing these priorities in more detail through your questions.

[English]

Meegwetch. Thank you. *Merci.*

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're going to open the questioning with MP Will Amos.

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister and your hard-working public servants. It's always appreciated when you come here to discuss budget matters, particularly given the amounts that have been invested in our indigenous peoples all across this country. This is a great opportunity to talk more about it.

I want to share my time with Mr. Eyking.

The topic I want to go into more deeply is around the Canadian Roots Exchange. You expressed some enthusiasm for that program. I, myself, was very enthusiastic when I had the opportunity to announce funding, with a constituent of mine by the name of Geoff Green, who is the founder of Students on Ice and who is well known for working with Inuit youth and bringing southern youth closer to Inuit youth, and vice versa. The funding that we announced, which was, I believe, somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$660,000, was through the Canada Service Corps, which is another fabulous initiative not falling within your purview that is connecting our northern youth to opportunities around democratic empowerment.

I wonder if you could speak to the indigenous youth programming here with the Canadian Roots Exchange and any other youth programming that you think is really important. In my view, our government's support for indigenous youth is at the core of what we're doing.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thanks very much for that.

We have been very impressed with the kind of work the Canadian Roots Exchange has been able to do in both indigenous and non-indigenous projects around reconciliation. I remember during the Toronto meeting of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the programming that was there was extraordinary—the history of the historic indigenous sites in Toronto. This is a really important program. I think that no matter what we do—asking people to reread history books, watch movies or read books—it's those relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous people, making new friends, that actually helps people go forward in eliminating stereotypes and racism and those things.

I think the work that the executive director, Max FineDay, has been able to do is remarkable, including the kind of speaking that he does, letting people know that the Environics survey has shown that over 80% of non-indigenous youth think they will see reconciliation in their lifetime. I'm not sure the indigenous people are quite so optimistic, but it is that optimism that I think can be the hope that we need there.

In call to action 66, it was very clear that this needed to be a network of youth coast to coast to coast. We appointed three ministerial special representatives, Maatalii, Gabby and André Bear, to look at what existed and what would be recommended, and they gave us a very good report. Now finally number 66 will be realized,

with that housed at Canadian Roots Exchange, and I think it will really make a difference.

● (0845)

Mr. William Amos: Thank you, Minister.

I'll now pass the rest of my time over to Member Eyking.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Amos.

Thank you for having me here. I wish I was on this committee more. I'm the chair of the trade committee.

Minister, welcome, and with all the travels you've done over the years, you've probably visited most of the communities in Canada. You have come to many communities in my riding. I have the largest population in eastern Canada of first nations, and the largest community is Eskasoni. You're very well aware of Eskasoni. You visited there.

There are a couple of big success stories in our community, and one is the education part. We have one of the highest graduation rates, not only in first nations communities but in Nova Scotia, right in Eskasoni.

We see a situation in Eskasoni that we think creates an opportunity, and I'm asking you if you see this across the country. Many of the elderly people in that community would have gone to the residential schools. Housing has always been an issue, and we're getting better at it, but we see an opportunity coming out of that community, where the elderly people should probably be leaving those homes but staying in the community. Many went to the residential schools and do not want to leave the community for various reasons. They'll get flashbacks. The opportunity that they see is having assisted housing or places for them in these communities. I'm wondering if you see that in other communities across the country. They want to stay in these communities but have assisted living or whatever so they go from the family units to just up the road. They're in a unit where the family can see them and work with them, and the community can work there.

It's a general statement, but is it something that our government, a future government, should look at more? I think it would not only really help the family units in the communities, but also the whole truth and reconciliation part.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think in the way that the previous indigenous services or INAC used to work, we did this and we didn't do that.

By moving to a new approach, which is about the services the communities decide they need, we will move into a better place where these kinds of things, like assisted living for seniors, become a priority for these communities. We're seeing in certain communities that they're living in semi-detached housing or in seniors-looking condos, with a nurse who can visit, those kinds of things.

You have the fabulous new health centre there. I think it's great. And thank you for highlighting Chief Leroy Denny. When the Mi'kmaq got control of their education system, that's the day he decided to be a teacher. They were at a 30% graduation rate and now they're over 90%.

I also want to congratulate you with Sir Paul McCartney yesterday highlighting Eskasoni in terms of that beautiful young woman covering *Blackbird* in the Mi'kmaq language. These are highlights for all of us.

Hon. Mark Eyking: It was a very proud moment. Thank you.

The Chair: Questioning now moves to MP Cathy McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. Also, thank you to the minister for coming today.

I think it would be very appropriate as we had the ceremony yesterday for the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls to maybe reflect on a few things that happened out of that ceremony.

I know we had talked certainly about a priority—I believe it was a shared priority—that number one, the families out of the process have some peace and closure. I know some were in attendance yesterday but I'm wondering if your department plans to follow up in any way to ensure that the process actually moves their healing in a positive direction as opposed to not.

What is your plan? Of course, the commission is done as of June 30. We absolutely all need to recognize the tremendous effort it took for those families to share their stories and the difficult journeys they've had.

• (0850)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: In response to the interim report, we invested \$21.3 million to continue the healing and support for families, but I think what those families have also needed and asked for is a way to commemorate the loss of their loved ones. The money that has come from Minister Monsef's department on commemoration will be there.

I think a lot of these families are now deciding what that should look like. Some want some sort of memorial, and some want a garden. People are working together on that, and I think you're so right that people now need time for healing. Sometimes events like yesterday's really do bring back difficult memories and times, but we need to make sure it unlocks the healing as they go forward. We are committed to do that.

As well, I think the family liaison units that were set up in all provinces and territories within victim services—a specialized unit for the families of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls—have been really important and well received. In the interim report, we said we'd continue that for another year, but we are hearing that people want it to go on further. I just think that, because this is still happening and families are still losing loved ones and need help navigating through a system, we want to make sure that we're there for them.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you.

You and I both sat, of course, on a special committee in the last Parliament where we spent a year reading through many reports and heard from many witnesses.

One of your key priorities was for this commission to identify systemic issues. Can you name any new systemic issues that you felt were identified through this process that you were unaware of through all your time in previous Parliaments and in your current

role? Are there any new systemic issues that you believe were identified through the process?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: The interim report was really a compilation of all the previous reports, and so that was what we were able to respond to. I think, regarding the needed changes to child and family services that are reflected in Bill C-92, we need to be aggressive about those changes. We know that there's significant money being invested, unfortunately, in lawyers apprehending children and in agencies and non-indigenous foster families. It has to go to community to prevent that. That's where, I think, there needs to be significant work. I don't think I really understood that certain communities were doing much better because they just refused to abide by provincial laws and kept jurisdiction of their children.

I think the other issue is the ongoing racism and sexism in policing. We are calling on the Senate to pass Rona Ambrose's bill. We have to get that judicial education, and we have to do a much better job on that. I think the racism and sexism throughout all of our institutions is something that the commission has really underlined, how prevalent and sinister it is across our country.

• (0855)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you. It sounds like perhaps it illustrated better...but there was nothing new that was identified.

I guess my next question related to that is that I had really hoped for a lot more articulation around... You know, four years ago we were calling for an action plan. That was something we talked about, that we needed to move forward with action. I noticed your Prime Minister talked yesterday about action.

It was not as specific around the issues of action as I had hoped it would be. Do you share that particular comment?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think that Minister Monsef has done an amazing job with her advisory committee on the broader issue of gender-based violence. I think this commission report calling for a national action plan must be done with partners: first nations, Inuit, Métis. It must also be indigenous-led, indigenous women-led, but it also needs to take regional variations into consideration. It's going to be a really important thing, so we will need to do that immediately.

This is the first national public inquiry, which means that the provinces and territories all signed on to the terms of reference. We will need partners going forward, and we will need their help designing what that process looks like to get to that national action plan.

The Chair: Thank you.

Questioning now moves to MP Niki Ashton. Welcome to our committee.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): I will defer to my colleague Georgina Jolibois, and I'll catch on to the last part of the question.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Good morning, and thank you.

I'm going to get right to the point because time is an issue. Across my riding, especially now in Timber Bay—you visited the area way back—survivors from the boarding schools and now the day schools are still waiting for justice. You have announced that you're working on a settlement, but I'm concerned that northerners are going to be left out. What can you tell northerners who have already been left out of settlements and denied justice that this process will be better for them, and that they'll finally see justice?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think we are very happy with the progress on Île-à-la-Crosse. As you know, the Métis were totally left out in the outrage of the residential school lawsuit, and in the IRSSA.

On the day schools, I think we heard very clearly from northerners that there wasn't enough time for them to sign up within a year, so we've extended that to two and a half years. I think we will now be able to make sure that, in all the regions of the country, people understand what they need to do.

I think the key has been the survivors wanted us to simplify the process so it would be a paper-based process where they could tell their story and then receive what they're entitled to without being cross-examined and without that re-traumatizing.

I think we are now awaiting the court to decide on the fairness hearings as to whether we will be able to proceed with the administrator, that will be Deloitte, as well as making sure that people have the help they need to fill out the forms and be able to get what they rightfully deserve.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Minister, I was very excited to hear in your intro that the reiteration of the goal of your department is to advance forward-looking and transformative work to create a new relationship with indigenous peoples. Where I come from, a pressing issue that is very much related to neglect of indigenous communities, as well as climate change, is the fact that winter roads are melting across our region.

I know, obviously, the winter road budget is under indigenous services, but if we're going to talk about transformative change, if we're going to talk about making a tangible difference in reconciliation, self-reliance and prosperity, other words that you used, the federal government needs to invest in an all-weather road system. It is clear that these communities are living in crisis. In fact, this committee just a few short months ago heard from a former chief from Berens River who talked about how the isolation that so many of his communities experience is connected to suicide, the sense of hopelessness and the lack of opportunities these communities create.

Unfortunately, despite the positive rhetoric, the fact is these communities have no alternative, and as winter roads last less and less, that feeling of hopelessness is only growing.

Your government has done nothing to commit to an all-weather road system in the last few years of your mandate. Do you see investing in an all-weather road system as a priority in making a tangible difference in the lives of indigenous peoples in northern Manitoba and in other parts of the country who are living this same crisis right now?

● (0900)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I'm very proud that we were able to get the railroad built, or committed, to Churchill. I think that is going to

completely open up things. Obviously, the Shoal Lake road, which opens this week, is important.

But I think you're quite right that, in terms of construction, in terms of all of these things, with climate change and the shortened winter road availability, there need to be permanent solutions. We're pleased that we at least were able to invest in the grid, which provides much more stable access to electricity, but I think we need to work with our partners and work on permanent solutions with the province, with Manitoba Hydro and with all of the partners that can deal with the reality of the isolation and food insecurity.

In the Arctic and northern policy framework, transportation was identified as a priority, so we have been working with our partners on those issues as well. As we are able to release the Arctic and northern policy framework, we will then begin the implementation of that with our partners and will be able to find real solutions.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you for that.

To go back to the inquiry report from yesterday, Minister, a point that was certainly emphasized by so many grassroots advocates and family members was the emphasis on recognizing what's been done to indigenous women as a genocide. I was disappointed not to hear that word used in the earlier discussion as it was a major take-away from yesterday's report. Certainly we view this as critical language in talking about what indigenous women and their families have gone through. I'm wondering if you could share your views on this.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: As the chief commissioner said, there are 1,200 pages of evidence of the policies that have resulted in this terrible tragedy in which women have died. I think the commission, with all of its deliberations, called this a genocide, and we accept that. That's interesting since we need Canadians to understand that from the Indian Act to residential schools to the sixties scoop to the present day with child and family services, children and young people have been dying.

In the pre-inquiry, we alarmed people by saying that sexism and racism kill, but they do. I think that's why this needs to go forward so there is an understanding that it wasn't just culture and language; people died. That's the reason we need all Canadians to understand these dark chapters in our history, and to understand the vibrant civilization that was here, in which women had influence and power. That was taken away when settlers arrived and they would talk only to the men. It was taken away by the Indian Act, which sent a woman into her husband's community, reversing the tradition. There is more and more evidence that these colonial policies have resulted in this tragedy. That's what we have to do: We have to accept the truth if we are going to change the path.

● (0905)

The Chair: Thank you.

Questioning now moves to MP Mike Bossio.

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

As always, Minister, thank you so much for being here. You're always welcome, and you've been here quite a bit, and that's greatly appreciated.

Minister, during the last election, our party committed to launching a national public inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. Upon the election, you immediately started working with survivors, family members and loved ones of victims, as well as with the national, provincial and territorial representatives to seek their views on the design and scope of an inquiry. In August 2016, the inquiry was launched, and yesterday the independent commission released its final report. How has this report changed and how will it change our country for the better?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think that, like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, all Canadians now hopefully know a little more about what causes this tragedy, that it's ongoing, and that not only is it about raising consciousness, but it's actually asking every Canadian to call out racism and sexism when they see it, and to understand that they need to know that the stereotypes they still see are wrong, and that we actually have an obligation—every single one of us—to do something about this.

It means that the federal government will do what it can. The provincial and territorial governments will do what they can, and municipal governments, indigenous governments.... But this is about a tragedy. From yesterday, seeing Bernie Williams and Gladys Radek, who first came to the Hill in 2004 asking for the inquiry.... I think they walked this country seven times and still people didn't know. Now, I hope, with the release of this report and with everybody really thinking about this tragedy.... These were loved family members who were lost or are missing.

Those family members asked at the beginning for three things. They asked to seek justice for their loved one; for support and healing for the families; and for concrete actions to stop the tragedy, to prevent it, to make sure that no other family would have to go through what they've had to go through.

I think we have raised the consciousness with this national public inquiry. It is what the families and the survivors asked for. It is as the commissioner said: once you know the truth, you can't "unknow" the truth. It's really important that we go forward.

Mr. Mike Bossio: You mentioned the families and the survivors. Can you tell me what you heard from the families about what this inquiry and the chance to share their stories have meant to them?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think that as the Prime Minister said yesterday, there were those who were able to share their stories; there are still ones who haven't. We hope that, again, unlocking the healing for all of the family members and the survivors....

It was really the first hearing in Thunder Bay at the beginning of the inquiry.... We had focused on the families, but there are survivors. There are people who woke up in an emergency department with bruises around their neck. There's my friend CeeJai Julian, who ran away from the Pickton farm. These are courageous people who have told their story. As I've said forever, we can't let them down. We have to move forward. This has to stop.

● (0910)

Mr. Mike Bossio: What has the federal government done since the report launched to combat violence against indigenous women and girls?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think that Minister Monsef's gender-based violence programs have been investing in community. With her advisory committee, this has been very important. I think in everything we've done, from housing to shelters to safe transportation on the Highway of Tears, we have been doing those important things.

In the response to the interim report, we invested an extra \$21.3 million on healing for the families, stood up the special unit within the RCMP on wise practices and invested in some of the community organizations on policing. We've also been able to start the healing with the funding that went to commemoration.

We've always said that we wouldn't wait for the final report and we need to keep going.

I think the change to child and family services, as I've said, is the transformational change—to not have these children at risk or abused because of this idea that taking children from their families and their communities would be in the best interests of the child. That's been proven wrong, and now we have to reverse that and work with our partners to make sure these children grow up as proud indigenous people with their resilience and their self-esteem. That is what will turn this around.

Seeing Tina Fontaine's grandmother there yesterday, and realizing what happened there in terms of that failure of what was to be child protection, was just awful. She was 15.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Is that the single most important thing we could do to end this national tragedy?

The Chair: We have to conclude.

The question now goes to MP Kevin Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister and staff, for joining us once again.

Yes, it was a very emotional day yesterday...the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, over 1,200 pages of testimony and 231 recommendations.

Let's start there, with the recommendations. The report calls them calls for justice, legal imperatives, and says that they are not optional.

Minister, do you agree with that statement from the commission yesterday?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: The status quo is not okay, and we are going to have to move forward. It means we are going to have to do it and co-develop a national action plan that will make sure the objectives that were set out in the terms of reference, concrete actions to stop this tragedy....

They have provided their calls for justice, and we will work with our partners to develop a national action plan—what, by when, and how—with all of our partners. That includes the provinces and territories, the municipalities and indigenous governments. We need to work together in a distinctions-based way, with regional sensitivity, and get this thing done.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: According to the media's reporting from yesterday, with the recommendations—all 231—it's all or none. The commission would like all the recommendations accepted, not just “pick and choose”. What will your government do?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It falls under the umbrella of the national action plan, so that means we go forward working with our partners in terms of what their priorities are and in a way that will stop the tragedy. That's what we need to do.

● (0915)

Mr. Kevin Waugh: In 2017, in the interim report by this committee, they talked about little efforts having been made... focused more on reactive than preventative measures. They brought that out two years ago, and they've seen very little movement there—from that interim report that they did.

How can we assure indigenous groups that this is going to change? Very little has happened in two years.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Well, I would have to disagree with that, honourable member.

After the interim report, there was an off-cycle budget for \$50 million that included the money for healing, the money for commemoration, the special unit in the RCMP and in policing. There are billions of dollars here in the estimates on housing, and all of the things that are truly moving forward. As I've said before, to me, as a family doctor and as a mother, the changes to child and family services, Bill C-92, are transformational. The fact that once again nations will have jurisdiction over their children and their youth and will no longer be vulnerable, preyed upon, to me, is transformational.

As well, the commission really made strong calls for justice on language. I think that Minister Rodriguez, in Bill C-91, has done important work there. Everything we have done is about changing the relationship, which was a colonized approach, one of paternalism, of disempowerment, to one of empowerment and a real respect for indigenous rights, and a relationship based on respect and partnership and co-operation.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I'm going to move on, Minister, if you don't mind.

Infrastructure in the north is a big topic.

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: The Inuit-Crown partnership committee released its report at the beginning of April, which suggested that funding delays for Inuit housing and infrastructure were eroding the overall effectiveness of these investments.

How can the government ensure stable, predictable and sustainable funding moving forward?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: What's exciting is that Inuit housing now has stable, predictable funding of \$400 million over 10 years. There

is \$40 million a year that will go forward. That's exactly what was asked for so that they can plan.

I also think we should salute the hard work at the Inuit-Crown partnership committee, because that's how we are co-developing the priorities, listening to our partners and being able to move forward on the things that really matter to them.

It was fantastic to get in to see some of the new homes in Inuvik when we were in the Inuvialuit territory. We know that housing really matters, particularly up there, where it's too cold to be homeless.

The Chair: Questioning now moves to MP Yves Robillard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Good morning, Minister Bennett.

Thank you for your presentation.

The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has opened the eyes of many Canadians to the terrible realities of Indian residential schools. I'm proud that our government is firmly committed to implementing the commission's calls to action. These calls to action set out a roadmap for reconciliation not only for all levels of government, civil society, educational and health care facilities and private sector businesses, but also for all Canadians.

As you said in your remarks, budget 2019 contains a number of investments to help your department implement the commission's calls to action. Can you tell us more about this?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thank you.

I'm very proud that we've completed or made a great deal of progress on 80% of the calls to action. Budget 2019 includes \$200 million to implement calls to action 50, 53 to 55 and 66 for indigenous youth, and 72 to 76 and 80. I'm very proud of our investment in the Indigenous Legal Lodge at the University of Victoria. My friend Marc Miller attended the launch of this initiative.

As you said, the roadmap for reconciliation is very important for all Canadians and for our partners. We must finish the job.

● (0920)

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you.

How do these investments build on the measures already taken by the government as part of the whole-of-government approach that you're talking about?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: In our first budget, we maintained historic investments. In 2016, the government provided \$2.6 billion over five years to respond to call to action 8, which calls for the elimination of the discrepancy in education funding for first nations children being educated on reserves and first nations children being educated off reserves. In 2017, the government invested \$1.7 billion over 10 years to respond to call to action 12, which calls for the development of culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for indigenous families. In 2018, the government invested \$1.4 billion over six years to respond to call to action 1 and help reduce the number of indigenous children in care in the child welfare system. There was also Bill C-92, which is very important.

Mr. Yves Robillard: My constituents want to be better informed of the government's ongoing progress in taking these essential steps towards reconciliation. The government is monitoring the progress in the implementation of the calls to action.

Can you tell us more about this?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: First, I encourage all Canadians to visit <http://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1524494530110/1557511412801>.

[English]

This website tracks the calls to action to see how we're doing. There's also a website on eliminating the boil water advisories in Minister O'Regan's shop.

[Translation]

All Canadians must accept their responsibilities and role in the fight against racism. The goal is to ensure that they have a better understanding of Canada's history, particularly its recent chapters, and that they contribute to the path to reconciliation.

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Questioning now concludes with Arnold Viersen.

• (0925)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the Minister for coming today.

I wanted to let everyone know that it's raining in Alberta, and our fires seem to be under control now, so it's been pretty awesome.

Minister, your portfolio is indigenous relations, and I'd like to get a little bit more clarity on where that's all going. One of the troubles that we have a little bit is who speaks for whom. That is always a bit of a challenge. With individual bands, particularly when they're small, you can get to know everybody in the whole band, and the elections become very.... Because it's small number, the margins are very slim, essentially.

When band elections happen, on what day the election happens and all these kinds of things can become very contentious. I'm thinking particularly about the case of Tallcree First Nation in northern Alberta. The band election is mandated to be in April, and it got pushed all the way back to September. There seems to have been a funeral that was placed on the day, which changes voter turnout and things like that.

What do you see as your role in these band elections and how is Canada...? Do you involve Elections Canada at all in that kind of stuff? I would like some comments around that.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thank you for the question, because in some ways what you're describing is the problems with the Indian Act. We imposed those rules and really eliminated the kind of democracy and governance that were there. In my job right now, I am pretty excited that over half of the Indian Act bands in this country are at a table working on getting out from under the Indian Act, some of them in a sectoral way, in terms of child and family services or their fishery or the education system.

My responsibility to help reconstitute nations means that whether it's a treaty area or it's geographic or it's by language, as we work to rebuild nations, they are then rebuilding their governance structures based on their laws and their legal—

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Sure, but the trouble comes in right now in that currently band council is administering everything. That's a reality that happens. The only method we have at this point is the band election, so what is your department's role in those band elections?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It's actually Minister O'Regan's Indigenous Services that deal with those issues. There is a unit within that so that if community members want to issue a complaint, it will be dealt with. Again, we are really endeavouring to move to a different system in which in many places the hereditary leadership also have a role, and the women have a role, as do the youth and the elders. We need to move to a system that is designed in a way that there can be the best possible governance and people can get out from under the Indian Act.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: In order for there to be a relationship, there have to be parties to that relationship. If you don't have proper elections, you don't know who represents. You're saying, well, there's hereditary.... How do you rank or decide who actually speaks for those people?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think that's the reason for reconstituting nations and what I think, as we look to some of the—

Mr. Arnold Viersen: If you were going to deal with Britain, you'd deal with a foreign minister. Who's the foreign minister for this particular nation?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: That's what the new nations will have. They will have ministers. They will have the minister of health. We go to many communities now where they really do have an elected person, a person designated, whose traditional role was that of external relations. With some of the modern treaties and organizations, we're seeing in very plain language that people understand exactly what was signed with Canada and how they will go forward as a government. That's, I think, the exciting transformation that we're seeing.

• (0930)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We've come to the end of our allotted hour. We could continue for the whole day, I'm sure, but I do want to thank you on behalf of all members of the committee for coming out and answering our questions and presenting the budget and the vision in the budget. We appreciate that very much.

Meegwetch. Thank you.

We're going to suspend for a couple of minutes, and then we will have the Minister of Indigenous Services come forward.

• (0930)

(Pause)

• (0930)

The Chair: Welcome, everybody. We're here at the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs of Canada, and we are working on the main estimates. This is the second hour, and it's our pleasure to host the Indigenous Services minister and staff.

Welcome to our committee.

Anytime you're ready, you can begin.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Indigenous Services): Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (0935)

[*Translation*]

I'm pleased to be appearing once more before the committee to discuss the main estimates of Indigenous Services Canada.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging that we're on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

I'm joined by Jean-François Tremblay, deputy minister; and Paul Thoppil, chief finances, results and delivery officer.

[*English*]

Now if my French didn't wake you up....

Also, I am also pleased to have Valerie Gideon here.

Before getting into my remarks, I would like to, first of all, thank members of the committee for their work over the last month studying Bill C-92 and the proposed amendments. The amendments accepted last week from all sides strengthened this bill. As many of you know, I was glad to see that it passed third reading last night unanimously. Thank you very much. Your hard work on this was really appreciated.

A vital component of our government's renewed relationship with indigenous peoples is our commitment to take action and dismantle the colonial structures of the past. Since the Prime Minister's announcement on August 28, 2017, my officials and Minister Bennett's officials have been working hard to establish the necessary structures and processes to make this transformation a reality.

In 2019-20, we look forward to dissolving Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada and in its place creating Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada as one department and Indigenous Services Canada as another. This change will better enable the government to continue its work on a renewed relationship with indigenous peoples based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership. It better positions the

government to build that relationship while closing the socio-economic gaps between indigenous and non-indigenous people and improving the quality of life for first nations, Inuit and Métis people. It finally responds to a very clear recommendation by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

Our focus at Indigenous Services Canada is working with partners to improve access to high-quality services for indigenous people. Our vision is to support and empower indigenous peoples to independently deliver services and address socio-economic conditions in their communities as they move forward on the path to self-determination.

As Minister of Indigenous Services, I am continuing the important work of improving the quality of services delivered to first nations, Inuit and Métis. This includes ensuring a consistent, high-quality and distinctions-based approach to the delivery of these services. A rigorous results and delivery approach is being adopted, focused on improving outcomes for indigenous people. Over time it is our goal that indigenous peoples will directly deliver programs and services to their peoples. We are working with partners to do this. I am working my way out of a job.

I would like to turn your attention to the reason that I am here today. I am now pleased to present to you my department's main estimates for 2019-20, which would total \$12.3 billion if approved by Parliament. The 2019-20 main estimates reflect a net increase of about \$2.9 billion, or 32%, compared to last year's main estimates. The net increase in budgetary spending primarily reflects the continuation of our investments in budgets 2016, 2017 and 2018 and in our most recent budget: all in all, investments totalling \$21.3 billion to support stronger indigenous communities and to improve socio-economic outcomes.

Here are a few examples of where this year's increase will help.

There is \$404.1 million in renewed funding for Jordan's principle: supporting children who need orthodontics, medical transportation, respite, land-based culture camps, medical supplies and equipment, educational assistance, mentorship, wheelchair ramps, vehicles, nutritional supplements.

There is an increase of \$481.5 million for the first nations water and waste-water enhanced program, improving monitoring and testing of on-reserve community drinking water, and building on investments that have not only led to the lifting of 85 long-term drinking water advisories since 2015, but that also keep us on track to lift all LTDWAs by March 2021.

[*Translation*]

There will be an increase of \$357.9 million related to non-insured health benefits for first nations people and Inuit.

There will be an increase of \$324.8 million for infrastructure projects in indigenous communities.

• (0940)

[English]

There is an increase of \$317 million for the first nations child and family services program, ensuring the actual costs of first nations child and family services agencies are covered fully, but also supporting initiatives to keep children and families together.

There is an increase of \$300.2 million for first nations elementary and secondary education, supporting a renewed approach for K-to-12 education on reserve as co-developed by us and the Assembly of First Nations.

There is an increase of \$113.6 million to build healthier first nations and Inuit communities, including our work to eliminate tuberculosis in Inuit Nunangat by 2030.

And there is an increase of \$101.1 million to advance the new fiscal relationship with first nations under the Indian Act.

These investments continue to build on the work we have already done to foster a renewed relationship based on respect, co-operation and partnership. Together with indigenous partners, we are working hard to improve the quality of life for first nations, Inuit and Métis people. Through budget 2019, we are making investments in first nations and Inuit health, social development, education and infrastructure.

In addition to Jordan's principle and ensuring first nations children now receive the services they need when they need them, our investments in the child first initiative ensure that Inuit children have access to the essential government-funded health, social and educational products, services and supports that they need when they need them.

Budget 2019 proposes an investment of \$220 million over five years to the Inuit-specific child first initiative, which will address the immediate needs of Inuit children. This investment would also support the ongoing work among the Government of Canada, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Inuit regions, and provinces and territories to develop a long-term Inuit-specific approach to better address the unique health, social and education needs of Inuit children.

There are also new investments to address urgent health and wellness needs to reduce suicide rates in Inuit communities. In order to deal with the ongoing suicide crisis in the Inuit communities, \$5 million has been set aside to support the national Inuit suicide prevention strategy.

The government is also making unprecedented new investments in indigenous post-secondary education, including 2019's proposal for \$327.5 million over five years to renew and expand funding for the post-secondary student support program while the government engages with first nations on the development of integrated regional education strategies.

There is \$125.5 million over 10 years, and \$21.8 million ongoing to support an Inuit-led post-secondary strategy, and \$362 million over 10 years, and \$40 million ongoing to support a Métis Nation strategy.

Starting this fiscal year, a new transfer to first nations communities, entitled "Grant to support the new fiscal relationship

for First Nations under the Indian Act", more commonly known as the 10-year grant, has been implemented.

More than 250 first nations expressed interest in the 10-year grant; 103 first nations were determined to be eligible based on criteria that we co-developed with first nations partners. They have received an offer, and I am happy to say that 83 first nations have now signed 10-year grant agreements.

The new grant, representing \$1.5 billion, is funded through the existing programs of Indigenous Services Canada and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, which are primarily related to education, social development, infrastructure, and first nations and Inuit health programs.

To ensure that the 10-year grants grow with the needs of first nations, budget 2019 proposes that starting April 1, 2020, funding for core programs and services provided through the 10-year grants will be escalated to address key cost drivers, including inflation and population growth. The 10-year grant provides communities with the flexibility and predictability needed to support effective and independent long-term planning. This initiative is a key part for establishing a new fiscal relationship that moves towards sufficient, predictable and sustained funding for first nations communities.

Last, I think it's imperative for me to highlight the work of everyone involved in making progress on our commitment to end long-term drinking water advisories on public systems on reserve by March, 2021. Since 2015, a total of 85 long-term drinking water advisories have been lifted, and 126 short-term drinking water advisories were lifted before becoming long term. We are well on our way to meeting our commitment. This will be aided through the 2019-20 main estimates by an additional \$66.7 million proposed by budget 2019, which has been dedicated to keeping us on track. I am extremely proud of this, as all Canadians should have access to safe, clean and reliable drinking water.

We have made, and are continuing to make, important changes in the government's relationship with first nations, Inuit and Métis people. While there is still a lot of work to do, our government's historic investments are making a difference in closing the gaps that exist, and improving the quality of life for indigenous peoples.

I'd now be happy to answer any questions that the committee may have.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (0945)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

We're going to open with MP Yves Robillard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister O'Regan, thank you for your presentation, especially the parts in French.

In your presentation, for 2018-19, \$29.4 million was provided to ensure that infrastructure investments reach local communities through the gas tax fund.

Can you explain how this amount was used?

[English]

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: You're going to have to forgive me, because I didn't get my translator on in time, and we've all borne witness to my attempts at French; my listening is not much better. I didn't catch all of it, but I think my deputy has it handy, so I'll let him speak.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-François Tremblay (Deputy Minister, Department of Indigenous Services Canada): As you know, this addition to the federal gas tax fund came at budget time, so very late in the year.

In the department, we reviewed all the projects that were already on our lists and that were ready. There were seven projects, if I remember correctly. We allocated the additional resources to these priority projects, which were ready. We took this approach, which helped to alleviate the pressure.

Mr. Yves Robillard: Okay.

Yesterday, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls released its report after over two years of work.

Could you share your opinion on the content and conclusions of the report?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Thank you, Mr. Robillard.

[English]

I think most of the people on this committee, if not all of you—it was a big crowd—were in that room. It was a heavy day. We're committed to ending the ongoing national tragedy of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and 2SLGBTQIA people. To end this national tragedy, we asked the commission to identify and examine the systemic causes of violence against indigenous women and girls. They have.

I think we all owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to all the survivors and family members who shared their stories, because that is not easy, and some of them put their own health at risk in doing so, having to relive a lot of moments that many of them have buried. For that reason, as the Prime Minister noted in his speech, many chose not to speak. We honour them for that choice as well.

This is truly quite extraordinary; it hit me yesterday. This is a national inquiry, the first of its kind, and I was quite taken by the number of provincial governments that were represented and that accepted copies of the report. We have a lot of work to do. We are committed to a national action plan, as you heard the Prime Minister say yesterday, and that's called for by the inquiry to implement the recommendations to make sure they're distinctions-based; that

they're flexible. As have all our efforts thus far, we know they must be developed in partnership with first nations, Inuit and Métis governments and organizations, the families of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, and the survivors.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you.

Can you share what the families told you about the significance of this inquiry and the opportunity it gave them to tell their stories?

[English]

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: As a formal part of the inquiry, I did not receive those testimonies, but I've received many testimonies in my travels from people who have been involved in very similar circumstances. They are deeply aggrieved; they feel deeply wronged. They feel the loss of a loved one. We have to get through this report meticulously, and we have to work quickly. We all understand that we only have so much time left in this session.

Some things we've worked on that are very much in keeping with the report, which, again, passed third reading last night and is an extraordinary piece of legislation because it was developed in partnership with indigenous peoples, I think will go a long way in the area of child and family services to finding solutions that indigenous people will develop themselves.

● (0950)

The Chair: You have about a minute and a half.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Questioning now goes to MP Kevin Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you once again, Minister and staff, for coming.

We'll pick up on the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls report yesterday with its over 1,200 pages and lots of stories. There were 231 recommendations in the commissioner's report. The report calls the calls to justice “legal imperatives” and says they are not options.

I'd like to know your opinion of that, coming out of the national inquiry.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: I don't think there's any question that we have a lot of work to do. I think some of those recommendations overlap with actions that our government is currently taking, so we have to read the report methodically.

We accept the recommendations in the report in their entirety, and now we have to decide what that national action plan will be. That will require a lot of vigorous work, I think, not only on the part of Minister Bennett's department and my department, but all departments, for the most part.

As you well know, I've said here before committee that every minister has in his or her mandate letter a commitment to reconciliation, and it is something that is going to require the efforts of the government.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I'm going to move on to the boil water advisories.

As you know, I don't share the government's enthusiasm about this. You're not going to meet your quotas. I'm going to give you some examples.

I know that you're touting the 85 long-term drinking water advisories that have been lifted, but I have met with so many indigenous groups and I'll give you one example: Slate Falls First Nation in northwestern Ontario. They had all 11 long-term boil water advisories—drinking water—lifted last year, in March 2018. I see that some of your staff know where I'm going on this. They got a new water treatment plant. Seventeen days later, it was back under a drinking water advisory. Today, Slate Falls is under a drinking water advisory, and it has been since August 29.

I can tell you that there are dozens of bands in this nation that are going through this problem—

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Yes.

Mr. Kevin Waugh:—and you keep saying, well, we've removed the long term, but we still have the short term, and we're not going to tell you what the long term is or what the short term is.

There is still a crisis, so don't tell me that we're going to reach this in 2021—because we will not reach it—but I would like to know what your department is going to do. I laugh when I see these reports come out, because I know they're not true. I can go to Slate, and I can give you a list if you want, but where are we going on this? You're not training band members properly. We can give them all the new equipment, but then we leave the reserve and then—in this case, 17 days later—they're back on.

What are we doing to rectify this when we leave the situation and leave them in charge of the water treatment plant? I think that's one of the issues that we need to address with your department.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Thank you, Mr. Waugh, for your hope and optimism.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Yes. The glass is half-empty.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Of drinking water, yes.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Pardon the pun.

• (0955)

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: No, no. We are on track to make this happen. We're doubling down on our efforts.

I'll let Paul take the floor to give you some quick figures.

I've also been to, for instance, Piapot nation in northern Saskatchewan and Piapot had theirs burn down. We have a new temporary one that is up and running, with staff who are tremendously proud of the amount of training they've gone through and that they are able to provide the fixes that are needed to make sure that community... I think there might be a notion that many of these communities are close together. Some of them, as you well know, out your way—it was an eye-opener for me—are quite spread out, so there's quite a bit of work involved.

At Piapot, they are very proud of the fact that they have that training on the ground. I then turned to this position, this belief—having seen it in other places—that you cannot simply build these things and walk away. If they are going to work, then you have to have people trained and on the ground and ready to make the fixes as they are needed. Also, a team of people provides meaningful employment.

The only way you're going to solve it on an ongoing basis is to make sure that there is training provided on the ground. That is already happening, and that was the commitment of the department.

Paul has some numbers.

You read them out, Paul.

Mr. Paul Thoppil (Chief Finances, Results and Delivery Officer, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Thank you.

Mr. Waugh, you're totally correct. It's not about simply putting in water treatment plants or systems where communities don't have access, but it's also about ensuring that for those who do, they don't go, ever, into a situation of long-term boil water advisories or even short-term ones. That's why, in budget 2019, there is an amount in front of you of \$739 million; it's for doubling down, to make sure that those who may be bubbling below long term are rectified and there is money for training and recruitment of staff, to ensure that those communities don't go into the situation that you just described.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: The Sahlaltkum Indian Reserve 4 in B.C., has had dangerous levels of manganese in their water, which has made the water turn brown. This is one of the issues that we have. We've seen this. What are you doing to address the band-aid solutions that we've seen in some of these areas?

Mr. Jean-François Tremblay: There are more than thousands of them, so, of course, it's a complex issue and each of them needs a specific approach, and that's what we're doing. We identified the ones who are at risk. Our approach is getting more and more sophisticated. At the beginning, everybody focused on the ones who are long term. Now we are focused on the ones who are at risk and we're focusing on training people and finding permanent solutions. Sometimes we come with a temporary solution and work on the long term after that.

Of course, it's a difficult task, given the size of the inventory, but if you look at the numbers, they're going in the right direction and we're still optimistic that we will meet our commitment on this.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: You're right to point out that it's a big challenge; it's huge.

The Chair: We're now moving to MPs Ashton and Jolibois.

I understand they're sharing their time.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

Minister O'Regan, would you agree that there is a housing crisis on first nations across this country?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Yes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Excellent. Why is your government not doing anything to address that?

In the 2017 budget, you made a commitment of \$600 million over three years and repeatedly we've heard from leaders, we've heard from advocates, that that is wholly inadequate and amounts to anywhere from one to 11 new homes per community, depending on their geographic location.

First nations in my riding, including communities like Cross Lake, a community of 8,000 people, have hundreds of people on the housing waiting list. There are communities in my riding where there are anywhere from 20 to 25 people in a home. We know that 50% of homes have mould in them, which leads to health issues, social issues, and truly it makes up what is known as a national crisis.

Your government has talked a good talk on reconciliation, on investment in infrastructure, but when it comes to housing, your government has failed.

I'm wondering what you can say to that, given that this is a very serious situation and truly a crisis that requires urgent action and should have required it years ago.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Thank you for the question, Ms. Ashton, and I would simply say that how you've characterized this is wholly untrue.

We have certainly done quite a bit. We came into government with 86,000 houses, that was our shortage. We have built or repaired 14,000 so far. That is not nothing; it is certainly not nothing to the people who live in those houses. Do we need to do better? Yes. Are we going as fast as we possibly can, given capacity issues? Yes.

It's \$600 million over three years to first nations, so far—\$600 million; \$500 million, over 10 years, for Métis nation housing; \$400 million over 10 years for Inuit-led housing. It's the largest investment in housing, I would venture to say, in federal government history. It will be ongoing.

• (1000)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Minister, I appreciate that—

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: I don't know if you do, though. Those are big numbers.

Ms. Niki Ashton: —but reading the numbers, dramatically... And when I've told you \$600 million, so it's not wholly untrue. Let me tell you, having spent time in the first nations I represent, and hearing from people directly, I am conveying to you the message that they give me, so I don't appreciate my assessment being characterized as wholly untrue.

I refer to the \$600 million figure, and if you do the math, that equates to one to 11 new homes per community, communities that have hundreds of people on the waiting list.

My question isn't asking you to repeat the numbers you've committed to. It's asking you, as minister, as the head of the department, as you've understood it's a crisis, what exactly are you planning to do to address the actual crisis, not just repeating numbers that I've said are inadequate in dealing with what's going on on the ground?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: We will continue to build houses as fast as we can in partnership with nations, in partnership with Inuit and in partnership with Métis. We work with them on the ground to determine their needs. It was only, I think, last week that I was in

Whitedog and walking through homes where there were five families in a three-bedroom house with the living room converted into another bedroom and two newborns less than one month old. There is no question that we have a significant challenge ahead of us.

We have increased our efforts at a level that the federal government has never seen. We will keep hard at it until we have provided adequate housing and proper housing to everyone who needs it.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Minister O'Regan, you will remember earlier this year when you were in La Ronge and you took a moment with me to stop and reflect at the memorial for missing and murdered indigenous women. One of the women is still missing, and her name is Happy Charles. I met with the family, and her family is still holding out hope that she will be found, but it's clear to me that they still need support. They need support in finding justice for Happy, and they need support in dealing with the trauma they have experienced and continue to go through. In your role as minister, what are you doing to help families like Happy Charles' and all the northern communities that continue to be forgotten by this government?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: We've done, I think, significant work in providing shelter and women's shelters on reserve across the country. We need to step up those efforts. I think we need to make sure that we never have situations again where indigenous women who are fleeing a bad place, an abusive house or—

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: With all due respect, Minister, we're not talking about a woman fleeing a bad situation. We're talking about a current situation where a woman is still missing, and the mom, the dad and the family are looking for support for mental health, police support and other support. She's not alone. There are other women across Canada, I'm pretty sure. What is the government doing to address that specific support system required?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Well, through new funding, we are enabling greater access to mental health supports, cultural supports and emotional supports for those survivors, for families, for those impacted. We saw that yesterday at the closing ceremony with individuals who wore purple shirts there assisting survivors, family members and attendees. They were there providing those supports to people who were present.

We remain committed to supporting survivors and their families as they seek answers. I mean, systemic institutional failures led to this tragedy.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Your answer is very disappointing because the family is currently still looking for support. The government fails to understand the immediate need to provide support when a family member is missing and looking for support.

•(1005)

The Chair: I am going to interrupt the proceedings because, as we see, there has been the call for a vote. I'd ask that the committee give unanimous support to continue for the next 15 minutes. That will give us enough time to get to the House, and we do have motions that we'd like to take care of as well.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: We will group them?

The Chair: If we get through them in five.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: With all due respect, I still have about 15 seconds.

The Chair: Yes, yes, I didn't take your time away. We have a seven and a five and a five.

Agreed.

You're ending seven and five.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: I'm sorry, can he make a comment, please?

The Chair: Yes.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: I will quickly say that our government was the one who initiated this unprecedented national inquiry because we understood the importance of this national tragedy. We have a lot of work to do with provinces and territories to make sure that we have that response time available to families. I know that the RCMP is creating a special unit that responds to requests from the national inquiry on specific files.

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry about interrupting.

We're now moving to MP Bossio for seven minutes.

Then we'll move to the Conservatives, and then to the votes.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. O'Regan, for being here again, representing our government. It is greatly appreciated to have you here today.

I want to respond to some of the questions you've received here this morning.

There has been \$21.3 billion in new money since being elected. We just had Minister Bennett here. There has been \$20 billion in new money since being elected for her department.

Have we ever remotely seen this kind of an investment into indigenous services and Crown relations?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Not that I'm aware of, no. Not even close.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Not even close, correct?

Of course, we recognize that's there's so much more that needs to be done.

However, given the investment that we've made so far, do you feel that we're making a big difference in indigenous communities, in the lives of indigenous peoples?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Most definitely.

I'll leave it to these guys to maybe provide you with specific numbers. I can certainly say that it is amazing to me.

In the past number of months, when I've dealt with leadership, despite the significant challenges that they still face in their communities, their bands and their regions, they understand now and have confidence that this money is coming. They appreciate things like the 10-year grant, which I'm quite aggressive in promoting when I meet with leadership who have not yet applied. It allows them the ability to know about and plan for the next 10 years.

They are not having to reapply every year, and fill out paperwork for a program or something on an annual basis. I think there are enough people around this table who have worked for non-profits, or have worked in places where you are constantly reapplying for government funding.

The fact is that you have a limited pool of people in small communities who are doing this hard and meaningful work. If you can make sure that they spend more time concentrating on closing the gaps and making their communities more prosperous for all, instead of filling out paperwork needlessly, year after year, program by program, that is real. That is energy and time that they can now be dedicating toward the people, the quality of life of their people and the future prosperity of their people.

That is a very real and significant movement. Leadership now, knowing and feeling some assurance that our commitments are real, are feeling them on the ground. They are not where they need to get to yet, as the national chief keeps reminding me. He's quite right. This is not parity. Progress is not parity. We're not there yet.

They want to talk more about the issues of economic development. They're looking at wanting to become self-sufficient communities: "We do not want to be relying on government. We want to increase professional capacity within our communities. We want to be the ones doing the heavy lifting."

It is really quite heartening to see that corner being turned by some leadership.

•(1010)

Mr. Mike Bossio: I can certainly tell you that for the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte in our riding, it's been transformational for them as well. There was the ending of long-term boil water advisories through the new plant. They have enormous pride in the training that has been received. It is Mohawks who are running and maintaining the plant. There have been new lines built year after year to different parts of the community, to bring them into the water treatment plant. This water filtration plant is making a transformational change within their community.

Then there are the investments in housing, in culture and in heritage. All of these things are raising, as you just mentioned, the self-sufficiency and the economic development to move forward.

We often hear about our government's commitment in relation to eliminating long-term boil water advisories—on public system, on reserve—by 2021.

I've been, as you know, following this closely, but we don't hear much about the 126 short-term boil water advisories. I think that's something that's really important, because we're getting ahead of the game. We're not just chasing this endless goal; we're making that leap to ensuring we don't have other communities that are on the verge of potentially being...

Could you maybe talk to those specific areas and why that's making such a difference?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Prevention is part of the cure, yes, and that also speaks to the increased capacity that we've been able to develop on the ground, that these can be identified quickly and that we have the resources now. Again, the resources are not enough—otherwise we would have everything done by tomorrow, but this is simply not how it works—but we do have a much stronger capacity on the ground to address these things as they come.

Did you want to speak any further to that?

Mr. Jean-François Tremblay: I'll just mention that, in terms of results, we talked about the 16,000 houses, the long-term drinking water issues. You're right that there are also the ones that are at risk, the vulnerable ones, so we're trying to be ahead of the curve on this one.

We built up more than 74 new schools and there are still 59 that are under way, and that's without counting the renovation of existing schools. More than 85 schools are being renovated.

We have made progress with the grants. You heard about the grants. We have 85 of them. CFS, of course, increased in funding but also the reform is going ahead.

I will turn to Val to speak about the mains and especially Jordan's principle.

Ms. Valerie Gideon (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Department of Indigenous Services Canada): Sure. On Jordan's principle, we're up to 227,000 requests received. We had a 78% increase in the number of approved requests between 2017-18 and 2018-19. In 2017-18, we had already assisted 78,000 children across the country. It's absolutely transformative. These are individual children, individual families and communities.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Do I understand correctly that there's also now an Inuit-specific program?

Ms. Valerie Gideon: Absolutely, \$220 million over five years was committed in budget 2019 for an Inuit-specific child-first initiative, and the first thing that we want to do in partnership with the national Inuit committee on health is assist families with food security issues.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Just like Jordan's principle and Bill C-92, it starts with children, correct?

Ms. Valerie Gideon: Yes.

The Chair: We are concluding with MP Cathy McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you. As I only have five minutes, with bells ringing, I'm hoping for short answers, but also if you don't have the answers to my specific questions, could you submit them to the committee at a later date?

Our committee worked really hard. We had a unanimous report called "From the Ashes" and that was after the extraordinary fire seasons of 2017. Your government responded positively to all our recommendations. We are now into the fire season of 2019, so here's my first question.

We had talked about ensuring that the funding was allocated for emergency preparedness, so updating emergency response plans. How many first nations received funding, and how many have updated their plans?

Mr. Jean-François Tremblay: We'll have to follow up with the answers.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: We'll submit them to you, Ms. McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you.

You also talked about the requirement for the tripartite agreements, that all tripartite agreements would ensure culturally appropriate services. How many tripartite services now have that embedded into the agreements?

• (1015)

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: We'll submit them.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you.

Also, Pikangikum just had to evacuate. You agreed that we require that one or more resource person be identified to assist with the registration of evacuees and to highlight their specific needs. How many were on the ground as per that recommendation?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: In terms of our employees, I don't—

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: No, this was to identify within first nations communities someone who would take on that role because they knew the community members, so that when they hit evacuation centres, there would be that local knowledge for the evacuation, so special accommodations could be taken care of.

Is that happening with that particular evacuation?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: It is. I'm just not entirely sure if it's with a particular individual that you're talking about, so let's submit that.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Okay. We are heading into the season. I know that in British Columbia and Alberta we are very concerned. We thought these recommendations were valuable, so a complete response would be appreciated—

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Done.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Minister, as you know, on Thursday we're going to be having a review of the Grassy Narrows issue and the 60-plus-year ongoing tragedy. I know that the community had high hopes. I understand you went there for a signing ceremony and basically you left empty-handed.

Can you update this committee in terms of how you failed to come to the agreement when of course, obviously, that was what you went to Grassy Narrows to do?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: I wouldn't constitute it necessarily as a failure on anybody's part. I would simply say that we had a deal. I was on the phone with the chief the night before. We were speaking to him then. The deal was fairly detailed, as I had done with Kashechewan and Cat Lake. There is a lack of trust in many of these communities, so they need to know—and have every right to know—timelines for specific project developments and have them costed. When we spoke the night before we were in agreement on all of those issues. When I arrived in community, they had changed. That happens; it's a negotiation. I've been in this job now long enough to say that's just all part of negotiations.

But certainly, we went there with a deal. We expected to sign a deal. The community had a community feast ready to go. The chief and his support staff changed their minds. Based on those changes, we want to come up with a meaningful response, because I'm determined to get this done—for those who are living with the effects, we believe, of mercury poisoning, for people who are living apart from community. We want them back in community, where we feel they can be better, where they can be closer to their families. I'm determined to make that happen. If we had been able to have that deal done last week, shovels would be in the ground now. I was ready to move.

We'll have to keep hard at it. This is the nature of negotiation, but I'm determined to get it done.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Obviously, we will be hearing from the chief, but I understand the switch was...focus on long-term support for those with mercury poisoning...to more of an assisted living model. Is that accurate?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: No. I'm not sure what the fine line is between the two, but certainly, that's what we were going for. We were talking about two different facilities, in fact.

The Chair: Thank you. That concludes our time.

We have two pieces of business. One is to deal with the 2019-20 main estimates. The second is to deal with the budget allocation for the Grassy Narrows study.

We will group all of the motions.

CANADIAN HIGH ARCTIC RESEARCH STATION
Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$31,704,049

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT
Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$3,316,984,242
Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$5,491,717
Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....\$2,625,384,706
Vote 25—Advancing Reconciliation by Settling Specific Claims.....
\$883,000,000
Vote 30—Enhancing Indigenous Consultation and Capacity Support.....
\$1,500,000
Vote 35—Honouring Missing Residential School Children.....\$7,758,176
Vote 40—Indigenous Youth and Reconciliation.....\$4,874,600
Vote 45—More Connectivity=More Affordable Electricity.....\$6,000,000

Vote 50—Supporting Indigenous Business Development.....\$25,777,783
Vote 55—Strong Arctic and Northern Communities.....\$5,000,000
Vote L15—Loans to Indigenous claimants.....\$25,903,000
Vote L20—Loans to First Nations in British Columbia.....\$30,400,000

(Votes 1, 5, 10, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, L15 and L20 agreed to on division)

DEPARTMENT OF INDIGENOUS SERVICES CANADA

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$1,954,110,539
Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$5,617,593
Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....\$9,496,193,599
Vote 15—Better Information for Better Services.....\$4,279,699
Vote 20—Continuing Implementation of Jordan's Principle.....\$404,100,000
Vote 25—Core Governance Support for First Nations.....\$24,000,000
Vote 30—Ensuring Better Disaster Management Preparation and Response.....
\$5,520,000
Vote 35—On Track to Eliminate Boil Water Advisories On-Reserve.....
\$66,700,000
Vote 40—Improving Assisted Living and Long Term Care.....\$40,316,600
Vote 45—Improving Emergency Response On-Reserve.....\$32,705,600
Vote 50—Safe and Accessible Spaces for Urban Indigenous Peoples.....
\$3,700,000
Vote 55—Supporting Indigenous Post-Secondary Education.....\$78,546,789
Vote 60—Supporting Inuit Children.....\$30,000,000
Vote 65—Supporting the National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy.....
\$5,000,000

(Votes 1, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, 60 and 65 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report the main estimates 2019-20 to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

I believe that the budget has been distributed. I need approval for the Grassy Narrows First Nation project study, \$10,000, and for Bill C-88, the Mackenzie Valley, \$20,200.

Cathy.

● (1020)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I believe at the very start we had talked about approving budgets, but at the end also having a follow-up budget so we can review what was approved versus what was spent. I think we have fallen away from that follow-up process that we originally considered.

The Chair: That's a good point. Perhaps we'll have an opportunity to do that before we adjourn. We'll talk to Leif about it.

Do we have approval for the budgets?

Some hon. members: Agreed

The Chair: Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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