



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

---

# Standing Committee on the Status of Women

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 105**

**PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT**

Thursday, April 18, 2024

---

Chair: Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman





## Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Thursday, April 18, 2024

• (1535)

[English]

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Madeleine Martin):** Honourable members of the committee, I see that there's quorum. I must inform the members that the clerk of the committee can only receive motions for the election of the chair. The clerk cannot receive other types of motions, entertain points of order or participate in debate.

We now proceed to the election of the chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the official opposition.

Now I'm ready to receive motions for the chair.

Go ahead, Mrs. Roberts.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC):** I nominate Shelby Kramp-Neuman.

**The Clerk:** It has been moved by Mrs. Roberts that Mrs. Kramp-Neuman be elected chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

Seeing as there are no further motions, I'll put the question on the motion. It has been moved by Mrs. Roberts that Mrs. Kramp-Neuman be elected as chair of the committee. Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

**Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Can I request a recorded division?

**The Clerk:** It has been requested that we move to a recorded vote, so I will proceed to the vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 4; nays 0 [See Minutes of Proceedings])

**The Clerk:** Mrs. Kramp-Neuman, I declare you duly elected chair of the committee. I invite you to take the chair.

**The Chair (Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC)):** We will suspend for about two minutes and then we'll carry on with the meeting.

• (1535)

(Pause)

• (1540)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

Welcome back to meeting number 105 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

I think it's incumbent on me at this point to acknowledge, thank and give homage to member of Parliament Karen Vecchio for her commitment, compassion, dedication and advocacy on this file.

Thank you, Karen.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the members and all witnesses.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name.

I believe we just have one member on video conference. Click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you're not speaking.

This is familiar to you, MP Lambropoulos.

Although the room is equipped with a powerful audio system, feedback events can occur. These can be extremely harmful to interpreters and cause serious injuries, so be mindful of that. The most common cause of sound feedback is an earpiece worn too close to a microphone. We therefore ask all participants to exercise a high degree of caution when handling the earpieces, especially when your microphone or your neighbours' microphone is turned on. To prevent incidents and safeguard the hearing health of the interpreters, I invite participants to ensure that they speak into the microphone into which their headset is plugged and to avoid manipulating the earbuds by placing them on the table away from the microphone when they are not in use.

All comments should be addressed through the chair. With regard to the speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do the best we can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members whether they are participating virtually or in person.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, November 27, 2023, the committee will resume its study of the implementation of a red dress alert.

At this point, I would like to welcome our witnesses.

We have with us today the honourable Minister Gary Anandasangaree, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations. We have, from the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, Valerie Gideon, deputy minister; and Krista Apse, director general of the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls secretariat. From the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, we have Kenza El Bied, director general, policy and outreach directorate, emergency management and programs branch; and Arjun Vinodrai, senior director, policy and programs development, emergency management and programs branch.

You will each have five minutes for your opening remarks followed by rounds of questions.

Minister, at this point, the floor is yours for five minutes.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations):** *Kwe kwe. Ullukkut. Tansi. Hello. Bonjour.*

Let me begin by acknowledging that we are gathered here on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

I want to thank all of you for your hard work in supporting this initiative.

[*Translation*]

Thank you all for the work you have done on this important initiative.

[*English*]

I want to acknowledge and congratulate you, Madam Chair, on your appointment.

I also want to take this moment to thank the former chair, Karen Vecchio, for her long-standing commitment to this issue and her hard work during the committee process.

Let me also thank my colleague and friend Leah Gazan from Winnipeg Centre for her incredible advocacy in uniting the House in supporting the establishment of a red dress alert, along with my colleague Pam Damoff. We are indebted to you for your hard work and your resolve to get us here. This work will save lives.

As we all know, budget 2024 included an investment of \$1.3 million to continue developing the red dress alert. This is exciting news that will help keep the momentum going.

Every indigenous person who goes missing and is not found is a failure on our part.

I know that there are some people who are frustrated at the pace of implementing the alert. There are some people who say that this can be done overnight. I do not subscribe to that belief. We need to keep the pressure on and move quickly, but we also need to get this right. There are many factors to consider, as you have heard throughout this study. Those include different regional contexts, strained relationships between communities and law enforcement, and jurisdictional considerations.

Moving the dial on this is not an option or a choice; it is a moral imperative. Despite only making up 4% of Canada's population, indigenous women and girls represent 28% of homicides perpetrated

against women. An indigenous woman is 12 times more likely to go missing or be murdered than a non-indigenous woman.

• (1545)

Alerting systems in states like California and Washington are helping locate people. The studies show us that the hours after someone goes missing are the most critical time to find them.

In February, I drove the entire Highway of Tears in northern British Columbia. I listened to grassroots organizers on the front lines, like the Tears to Hope Society, who you heard from earlier this week. Alongside a red dress alert, they stressed the importance of resolving this systemic crisis.

At the Denny's where we met, the women told me how important ceremony is to them and how important it is to pass along traditions and languages to the next generation. In 2016, our government called a National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls after years of previous governments' refusals.

[*Translation*]

This June will mark five years since the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls released its final report—and the calls to justice.

[*English*]

The 231 calls to justice require investments in shelters, community safety, culture, housing and infrastructure. We are making progress in all these areas. Budget 2024 was another example of that, but I say this all the time: The calls to justice are not a checklist. They require urgent, sustained action and commitment from all parties. They're long-term, structural changes that help us undo the legacy of colonialism. This work is critical and it will not happen overnight.

Eventually, the hope is to get to a place where we no longer need the red dress alert, or, in other words, we build a future where indigenous people are safe. The government will be a partner in that journey.

I thank everyone who has contributed to this process in informing the path forward. Your work is invaluable.

*Meegwetch. Qujannamiik. Marsi. Merci.*

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

I'll now give the floor to the Department of Public Safety for five minutes.

**Ms. Kenza El Bied (Director General, Policy and Outreach Directorate, Emergency Management and Programs Branch, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness):** Thank you, Chair and committee members, for the opportunity to speak to you today.

Before I get started, I would like first to acknowledge that we are gathering today on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

In my role within public safety, I'm responsible for working with other federal departments and agencies, provinces and territories, national indigenous organizations and other stakeholders to advance and integrate a policy approach to all aspects of emergency management.

[Translation]

I want to begin by saying that I share your deep concerns that indigenous women, girls, two spirit and gender diverse persons continue to be at greater risk of abduction, homicide and other forms of violence.

I commend the work you are undertaking through this study.

[English]

To support your committee's work, I would like to speak about the national public alerting system, its governance and Public Safety Canada's role.

The national public alerting system provides federal, provincial and territorial emergency management organizations with the standard alerting capability to warn of imminent and unfolding threats to life. Like all emergency management functions in Canada, public alerting is a collaborative initiative between federal, provincial and territorial governments, as well as industry partners.

The governance of this system is complex. There is no overarching governing body. There are many players involved in this system.

First, individual governments determine who, within their jurisdiction, may issue alerts through the system on matters related to their responsibility. These designated authorities decide when to issue an emergency alert, the alert type, the message content and geographical areas affected.

Second, Pelmorex Corp. operates the system that validates and disseminates emergency alerts. Pelmorex is supported by a multiple stakeholder governance council, which provides direction and advice on technical priorities.

Finally, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission sets out the regulatory framework for the mandatory distribution of alerts.

With regard to the role of my department, we support the national public alerting system primarily in two ways. First, we support the coordination of activities of federal alerting partners with those of the provinces and territories. Second, we support collaborative work with provinces and territories to advance shared priorities for this system.

One of our key policy interests for this work is advancing a common approach to emergency communications, including the adoption of standards and best practices. With regard to federal-provincial-territorial collaboration, SOREM—made up of federal, provincial and territorial senior officials responsible for emergency management—is the primary forum where this occurs.

SOREM is made up of the heads of provincial and territorial emergency management organizations and the assistant deputy minister of the emergency management and programs branch of

Public Safety Canada. SOREM is the steward of guidelines for the consistent presentation of alerts through the system, including the common look and feel guidance, the Canadian profile of the common alerting protocol and the broadcast immediate events list. These guidelines aim to ensure emergency public alerts are easily recognizable anywhere in Canada.

I want to conclude my remarks by emphasizing that Public Safety Canada is committed to collaborating with all public-alerting stakeholders to improve the effectiveness and continuity of emergency alerting in Canada.

With regard to exploring new uses of the system, I would note that SOREM has recently facilitated revisions to these guidelines to support a test by Quebec to evaluate the use of the system to distribute a silver alert.

In the context of your discussions, my team at Public Safety Canada has been supporting our colleagues at Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada in its red dress alert engagement. We have been providing subject matter expertise and considerations on the potential to use the national public alerting system for such an alert.

We look forward to continued collaboration with provinces and territories, including supporting Crown-Indigenous Relations' engagement at SOREM, as their work continues.

I'm pleased to take any questions. Thank you for this opportunity.

• (1550)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC):** Madam Chair, a point of order.

When acronyms are used, it is not clear for the francophones who rely on interpretation. I don't know whether Ms. Larouche is wondering the same thing, but can someone tell me what the SOREM is, exactly, before we can ask questions?

Thank you in advance.

[English]

**Ms. Kenza El Bied:** I said SOREM. It's the senior officials.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Can you give me the name in French, please?

**Ms. Kenza El Bied:** Yes, I'm sorry. Give me two seconds so I can check.

[English]

**The Chair:** Ms. Damoff, go ahead on the same point of order.

**Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.):** I think it would be helpful, even in English, if you said what SOREM stands for. I know it's an acronym, but what do all of those letters stand for?

**Ms. Kenza El Bied:** The “S” in SOREM is for “senior”. It's the senior official representatives.

I'm so sorry. I thought I said it at the beginning.

**The Chair:** That's okay. If you could attempt to say it in English and in French that would be helpful.

**Ms. Kenza El Bied:** Yes, for sure.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Kenza El Bied:** I have it in French.

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** I have just been sent it.

Thank you.

**Ms. Kenza El Bied:** I'm really sorry. That is something we should always do.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We have it now. We're good.

The first six minutes go to MP Ferreri.

• (1555)

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses.

The only reason I knew exactly what my colleague was talking about is that I asked the question before we even started as to what SOREM stands for—to my colleague's point—so no worries at all. We live in an acronym world here in Ottawa.

I have a question for Ms. El Bied. If you were told today to implement the red dress alert, if it was given the go-ahead by SOREM, then it sounds like the infrastructure's already in place—the weather alert and Amber alert systems. If this were added on, how long would it take to implement it?

**Ms. Kenza El Bied:** Unfortunately, I am unable to give you a timeline on how long it will take to implement this because it will need a lot of engagement with the provincial and territorial organizations.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** I'm sorry. I'll be more clear. I don't mean that from a relationship perspective. I mean that strictly from an infrastructure technology perspective. Is the technology already in place? If it were to get a go-ahead, then is it ready to go?

**Ms. Kenza El Bied:** I will not describe it as “ready to go”. It depends on which type and what the details and technical elements that need to be implemented are, because the infrastructure that we have in place right now is not general infrastructure that could be used for any type of alert.

Please add to this, Arjun, if you have any details on that.

**Mr. Arjun Vinodrai (Senior Director, Policy and Programs Development, Emergency Management and Programs Branch,**

**Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness):** I'll just to add to that point. The exact requirements will need to be determined through the engagement, and then that will determine the timelines, technological requirements, etc.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Thank you.

What I'm getting at is that we had a witness here who suggested that the weather alert system would work really well for this, in particular because it's regionalized. I live in Peterborough—Kawartha. If there's a tornado warning in Peterborough—Kawartha, then that alert system goes strictly to Peterborough—Kawartha. If there's a missing indigenous woman in northern Ontario, in whichever area, is it ready, infrastructure-wise, with what's already there? That's what I'm saying. Is it already in place? I'm trying to get an answer out of that.

**Ms. Kenza El Bied:** There is infrastructure in place for the weather alert. I'm afraid to say whether the same infrastructure would be used for the red dress alert. I am not in a position to say that the same infrastructure would be used for this kind or type of alert, unfortunately.

We can take that back, dig into it and provide a written response, but I cannot respond to the critical timeline or confirm that there is infrastructure in place for that.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Minister, do you know the answer on that infrastructure piece? Listen, we are all on board with this alert system. What we're trying to do here is nail down the details to ensure that it gets out. It sounds like the infrastructure's already in place.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Let me just say that there are a number of different pieces and available technology that can be relatively easily adopted to a red dress alert system. I think the issue that we are addressing—and I'm going to ask Krista to elaborate—is what we're going to do in terms of who's in charge of the alert system. There are a lot of issues around codevelopment that we need to work on.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** That's totally fair. I 100% understand that piece. We heard that through testimony.

What I was just trying to say is that, when we got the COVID alerts, the alert system was already in place, which is very good. I think what is frustrating for folks is that it's there; we don't need dollars invested in this. We have that.

I understand the relationship piece and who's overseeing that, which was a lot of what we've heard. I appreciate that in terms of ensuring that the right people, in particular indigenous leaders, are at the helm of this. I respect that.

Minister, you talked about driving along the Highway of Tears. I'm curious. Did you try your cellphone when you were driving along that highway, and did you have any dead zones?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** There were three of us who drove. Cellphone service has improved drastically, so I would say, when I went, it was much better.

There were some dead zones, I would say, between Terrace and when I visited the Nisga'a, for example, and in other places as well, but I think there are new cell towers being built there.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** I think, Minister, you can appreciate that a dead zone is literally a dead zone when somebody doesn't have access. That's one of the big key issues we would like to raise.

You have shown that this is important to you, but how are you going to work with your ministers to ensure that when you have an Auditor General's report that found that rural and remote communities are currently sitting at 60% high-speed Internet access and the same AG report says government efforts are falling short...? While 91% of Canadian households have access, just 59.5% of those in rural and remote areas enjoyed the same access, and that number drops to 42.9% for households on first nation reserves.

• (1600)

**The Chair:** Do you think you can wrap up in about 30 seconds?

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** What we're looking for here is to ensure that this is going to be addressed—it has to be addressed—to ensure that this red dress alert saves lives.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** I completely agree.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The next six minutes will go to MP Sidhu.

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

Thank you, colleagues.

Before I begin my questions to the minister, I would like to make an important comment about the election of the chair of this committee.

I want to welcome and congratulate the chair of this committee—it's nothing against you. We all look forward to working with you collaboratively, like our past chair was doing with us.

Mrs. Vecchio established her place here over the years. The previous chair of the committee made sure we worked well together, listened to the experts and, most importantly, produced many good reports. I've known her since 2017 and she made sure the committee produced a record number of good reports.

From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank Mrs. Vecchio for her passion and for her work for all Canadian women and girls through this committee.

I do not understand the decision of the Leader of the Opposition to remove such a great advocate for women and girls, such as our previous chair for this committee.

With that said, we have important work to do, so I really want to thank her for her work. Let's work collaboratively, the way your predecessor established.

Now I'll go over to you, Minister.

Thank you for joining us today with your team. The committee's united in making sure that a red dress alert system is established and works properly to save lives.

This committee heard many times that the system should be indigenous-led. How do you plan to implement this important principle?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Thank you.

We have undertaken extensive engagement. There have been over 16 engagements in the different regions of the country, many of which were attended by MP Damoff, as well as MP Gazan. I participated in some of them.

There are a number of different critical partners who have been working for many years on the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and gender-diverse people, and they've informed us a great deal.

The next step of this is where we need to start codeveloping the system along with our partners and to ensure that the system is responsive to the needs, because the last thing we want to do is create a system that is devoid of usage by those who are meant to use it, as well as those it's meant to support. It's critical that we get this right.

I want to ask Krista Apse to shed a little more light on what the next steps are.

**Ms. Krista Apse (Director General, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Secretariat, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs):** Thank you, Chair, for the question.

When we talk about codevelopment, there are some things we want to think about. Some are things we already talked about through the engagement sessions but at a very high level. We really need to get into some further detail around defining criteria and what that actually means. We can't pretend to define that criteria as a government. That must be done with partners and with technical organizations on the ground who have a clear understanding about what that impact will be.

You have heard a little about oversight and about the importance of who actually oversees the red dress alert. That's another important element that we would want to talk about further with partners and come to ground on what that oversight would look like and how law enforcement would be involved in the red dress alert system.

We also need to talk about what information is captured. How is that information captured and who oversees that information? How is that shared publicly, and what elements of that are shared publicly? Those are all things we need to continue to have conversations about and to engage on with indigenous partners and with people who have a solid understanding of that on the ground.

Maybe I will add one last thing. I'm sure the committee has heard about wraparound services and about the need for the connections between and among the wraparound services, which need to exist to support families and survivors once a woman is found. How do we make sure that takes place? What exists already? How do we make those connections between the various services that are offered and that exist? What gaps exist?

• (1605)

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** We know that many municipalities such as Regina and Winnipeg are home to vibrant and strong urban indigenous communities. How would a red dress alert system be administered in these communities? Minister, could elaborate on that?

**The Chair:** If you could possibly wrap up in about 30 to 40 seconds, that would be great.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** At this stage, we're looking for provincial, territorial or regional partners, and we have a number of very active discussions. There are at least two provinces and two territories willing to start this process. I think as we continue the discussions, we'll be able to hone in on which region we start off with. Obviously, our expectation is that it would be a national system. Once we have the local area coverage figured out, it will be expanded to a national system.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

We absolutely have to finish this study and set up this alert, so I hope our committee will manage to produce a productive report so we can move forward and complete this study.

Thanks to the officials and the minister for being here.

Minister, at page 295 of the budget tabled on Tuesday, we learn that the federal government has provided an investment of \$1.3 million over three years for the first phase of setting up the red dress alert.

That is fine, but how are we going to be sure that the alert will be put in place in an organized fashion and as appropriately as possible?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Thank you for the question, Ms. Larouche.

[English]

In budget 2024, as you rightly pointed out, there is \$1.3 million allocated, I believe, over three years to start the work. As I indicated earlier, we have started discussions with some of our provincial and territorial colleagues. We have been working over the last year or so in the consultation phase. We have a "what we heard" report, and we are ready to move to the next phase of this, which is codevelopment and continuous engagement. As we hone in on a region, a territory or a province or two where we can start implementing this, we will be able to continue to monitor and see how it works.

I think the first step of this is to look at a microcosm of the country and to look at several regions, whether that's Regina, Vancouver, part of Vancouver or northern British Columbia. I think that's the phase we're in. I believe this funding will allow us to do that.

From a technical perspective, I don't know, Krista or Valerie, if you want to add to this.

**Ms. Krista Apse:** Chair, the only thing I would add is that we need the time to get this right, while understanding that there's an urgency to do so.

From a technical perspective the reason why we want to do this on a regional basis first, and then broader, is to make sure that we can get the local considerations right, as we've heard different things across the country.

• (1610)

[Translation]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** I understand. You are saying that it is moving forward and you have reached the codevelopment phase. What concerns me, however, is that in its budgets, the government announces investments with great fanfare, to carry out initiatives, but the money never makes it onto the ground. We see this too often, particularly when it comes to indigenous affairs.

My colleague who works on the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs reminds us of this regularly, within our party, and I am sure that my colleague could say the same thing. The money is shown in the budget and it looks good, but too often it stays in the government's coffers and is not used on the ground to implement concrete measures that are going to improve people's lives.

In the case that concerns us, it is women who are dying, murdered women and girls, Minister.

How are you going to make sure that this money does not stay in the government's coffers? I would point out again that this is an investment spread over three years and the next election will take place by that time, Minister. We can almost call this an election promise.

How are you going to make sure that this is not an election promise and the money shown in the budget will be used concretely on the ground as fast as possible, to ensure that this alert, which indigenous communities are asking for in memory of missing and murdered women, is implemented?

We hope that this alert will be created, so that those women will have not died in vain.

[English]

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** I'm going to briefly answer this and ask the deputy minister to continue.

What's unique about this situation is that a lot of work has already been done. We're not actually starting after the budget decision. We've done an extensive amount of work over the last several months, almost a year, in terms of engagement, and whether in a formal sense or the 16 engagement sessions that took place in different regions, there have been distinctions-based conversations.

In every region I visit, I usually meet with groups who are working on MMIWG2S+, and I continue to do that engagement. We have come far but there's still some technical issues to iron out as well as the core development piece. Up until now, we were not sure what the next phase would be. The decision really does allow us to move forward.



[Translation]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** Before you answer, Ms. Gideon, I would like to ask you a question.

You said that you wanted to take local considerations into account. However, are you going to make sure that this alert will be implemented by and for the indigenous communities and they will be part of the process? That is what they have requested.

**Ms. Valerie Gideon (Deputy Minister, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs):** I can assure you that the funds we have received will go entirely to the partners. There is no funding for the government's internal activities.

In addition, we have done a lot of research on local models that already exist, from which we have learned a lot of lessons. There is no doubt that an initiative is more effective when communities are stakeholders in implementing it and they have confidence in it.

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Ms. Gazan, you have six minutes as well.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you.

I'd like to welcome you to our committee.

As you can see the solidarity around this table is pretty fierce. I want to let you know that my abstention was in no way a reflection of you. That's important. I want you to feel welcome here, but our solidarity is pretty fierce.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I appreciate that.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I also wanted to thank you, Minister. I know that you've prioritized MMIWG. That doesn't mean that you're not in the hot seat today.

I thank Pam across the way for starting the discussion with me. Quite frankly, all members of this committee have been tremendous in their support, not just on this study but on other studies to really support justice for indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people around the country. It's very touching. It shows that we can work across party lines to advance human rights in this country. I want to thank the committee for that as well.

I saw the budget. I have to say, Minister, that I was quite taken aback. I'm going to share quickly why, and I'd like a response.

The budget included \$1.3 million over three years, knowing that we are in the process of an election cycle and knowing that this is timely. I was happy to see that there was \$20 million put in place to search the landfill. I feel relieved for the families. Again, that's an action that has to happen, like the red dress alert, after women's lives have been taken.

The budget included \$47 million to deal with the auto theft problem. Although I know that the auto theft problem is really tremendous in this country, the message is very clear that this country cares more about cars than it does indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

I'm wondering why there weren't more dollars put in specifically in the areas of prevention to deal with what has been acknowledged by your government and leader as an ongoing genocide.

• (1615)

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Thank you.

I'll call you Leah, if that's okay.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Yes.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** I thank you for the question. I know we've had some conversations about this leading up to the budget. Your concerns are noted, and I acknowledge them.

On the report of MMIWG and the 231 calls for justice, they are quite large and vast. There is a preventative component and a supportive component. The preventative component goes to the core of the social determinants of health.

We have continued investments on housing. I recognize that there are still gaps. I think it's critical. There are issues around emergency shelters. Emergency shelters and transitional homes have \$27 million. I think transitional homes on reserves are a critical point here. There's over \$1 billion for health care, including mental health and uninsured benefits like medical travel and so on, like the opioid crisis—

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Just to.... Okay. I'll let you finish.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** I can frame it as a much broader issue. We can't just look at the two items and say, "This is it." This is a much broader level of investment. In fact, it totals over \$9 billion. It goes to the core of many of the relationships that—

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Sure, but in all fairness, Minister, that's over a number of years.

I have to say that the AFN came out yesterday commenting on the lack of investment in housing. We know there's a direct relationship between women going missing and housing.

I've put forward a private member's bill that's coming up for second reading to put in place a guaranteed livable basic income. We know women's organizations that have come in front of the committee have indicated that a guaranteed livable basic income is the most critical initiative to really tackle gender-based violence. As you know, call to action 4.5 of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls calls for exactly that. Your government has committed to implementing all of the calls to action that it has control over.

I'm wondering if you're going to live up to your promise and support my bill for a guaranteed livable basic income.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** The best way I can commit to that, Leah, is to say that I will work with you, as always. I will work to ensure that we have the supports that are necessary and the additional investments that are required to ensure that indigenous women are not in vulnerable situations.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I appreciate that, but it calls specifically for a guaranteed livable basic income. It doesn't call for other investments. It calls for amending our current social safety net to save lives and to give women options, so that they don't have to stay in violent situations or put themselves in precarious situations that are violent.

My bill is coming up, and I'm hoping that we can at least get it to study. I'm hoping we can all work together to keep our promise and hold up those calls for justice, which include 4.5.

I'm getting cut off. I never looked at Karen because she would let me go on, so I'll do the same with you.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Perfect. If you just want to wrap up...or are you good?

Regarding time, for those who don't peek up at me, we do have to make some changes.

To have everyone have a voice in the second round, Dominique, instead of five minutes, you and Ms. Hepfner will both have four. Then we'll have one and a half, and one and a half.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Vien, you have the floor for four minutes.

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and welcome to the committee.

I also want to recognize Ms. Vecchio. We are very good friends on this side.

I am a bit disappointed, even very disappointed, Minister.

Normally, Mr. Serré also participates in this kind of study. Today, however, we are all women here and we all agree that the red dress alert has to be implemented.

The government announced the meagre sum of \$1.3 million in the budget. You will tell me that is better than nothing, but it is not much.

I did not really understand Ms. Gideon's answer a little earlier, when she said that you had not invested too much money because the investments were coming from partners. You can explain all that to us, but I am frankly disappointed.

I do not understand why, as we are speaking, you do not yet have a plan for implementing the alert.

If memory serves, the government held its first round table in January 2023. You have held only one meeting, and we do not know when the next one will be. You can explain all that to us.

The big question I am asking myself right now is whether you are encountering difficulties and resistance in provinces or territories or within organizations that would not approve the project.

Very sincerely, given everything there is right now, whether it be Amber alerts, grey alerts, or the experiences people have had more or less everywhere in Canada that we have been told about, what are you waiting for, to get moving and put this project in place?

It is not complicated. There are cell phones, there is television, there are programs, we have the CRTC, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

What is needed is political will. Do you have the political will, Minister?

We are very disappointed.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Thank you for your questions and comments, Ms. Vien.

[*English*]

I appreciate the passion here. This is frustrating in the sense of how long it's taking to move forward, but I can assure you that, since 2023, we've had two round tables. In fact, we had a second round table this February. We brought together all the provinces, and we had best practices that were shared by the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia, and by the Yukon territory.

A number of ministers attended, including the deputy minister from Quebec. I believe there is general consensus on the need for a red dress alert system. That is also what we heard in the engagements we had. There were 16 of them across Canada, in a formal way, and a dozen or so informally, by myself. We have been working diligently on this, and we will continue to do that. The challenge is that I don't believe there's a consensus in terms of some of the—

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** What difficulties are you encountering?

What is the wrench that is being thrown in your works? What is it that is not working?

[*English*]

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** I can give you one concrete example.

One challenge we have is that many of our public alerting systems are rooted in law enforcement, with law enforcement as the lead provider of those alerts. As a result, the challenge that I'm facing and the resistance that I'm facing, somewhat, from many grassroots indigenous women's organizations and from women who have been working on this for many years, is an endemic distrust of police. It is historical, and in many ways it is linked to the legacy of colonialism.

Finding the appropriate balance and the bridge that I think is required to build that trust, so that we not only rely on police but also have an alternate system, will take time, Madame Vien. It's not something that we can necessarily just bypass

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

MP Hefpner, please go ahead.

**Ms. Lisa Hefpner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.):** Thank you.

I would also like to take a minute to explain why I could not support the election of the current chair. It is not personal at all—and I hope you don't take it that way—but I think some of my colleagues and I were really devastated by what happened to Karen Vecchio.

I don't know why she was thrown off this committee, but it feels like she was thrown under the bus. It feels like it's direction from the Conservative leader to keep committees from working collaboratively because that is exactly what we have been doing at this committee.

• (1625)

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** I have a point of order. Let's keep to the topic of the red dress alert.

You're completely making assumptions about the Conservative Party. If you want to congratulate Karen, go ahead and do it, but don't go after the Conservative Party on this. Let's keep it to Karen, our respect for her and the respect we have for the new chair.

Thank you.

**Ms. Lisa Hefpner:** That's not a point of order, and I hope you can give me back my time on that, Chair.

The point is that Karen Vecchio knew these issues. She has worked so hard for so many years. She worked with her whole heart, and we have been able to accomplish great things at this committee. I really hope we can continue being collaborative and accomplish things like this red dress study, because it's important.

With that, Minister and officials, thank you for being here with us today. We're all a little out of sorts—

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I'm sorry, but I have a point of order, Chair.

The language that Ms. Ferreri just used is completely inappropriate in committee.

I don't know if you heard her, but I would appreciate it if she would retract what she just said.

**The Chair:** MP Ferreri, would you like to speak to that?

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Did anyone hear what I said? Is that on the record?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I certainly heard it across the room, Michelle.

Do you want me to repeat it for you?

**The Chair:** MP Ferreri, would you like to retract what you said?

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** I would like to move forward with this red dress alert study. If I've offended Ms. Damoff, I retract what I said.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

MP Hefpner, please go ahead.

**Ms. Lisa Hefpner:** Thank you.

What we've been hearing at this committee is that Pelmorex and the Weather Network have a system in place that could be adapted to a red dress alert. The problem is that we want this red dress system to be indigenous-led, and the key point of that is the threshold as to when the alert is issued. Who makes that decision? Who looks into whether an alert should be sent out, and whether it's someone who truly is at risk or maybe someone who doesn't want to be found?

Collaboratively, in some of the different discussions, it has evolved into a regional approach in that there might be regional bodies of indigenous women who oversee the process. Rather than working with police services to set the threshold and take next steps, it would go to a body of indigenous leaders to make those decisions.

I'm not sure if it would be better for the officials or for the minister to answer that, but maybe you can weigh in on how you envision that sort of system working.

**Ms. Valerie Gideon:** One of the examples we've seen is an emergency alert system that nations in the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq, in Cape Breton, have put in place. They use that alert system for missing persons, for weather and for emergency situations. They have worked with a technology company in order to be able to design that.

That's at the level of an island with several communities, but you could take a model like that and replicate it at a provincial level.

We're not presuming that no one will want to work with law enforcement, but we wouldn't want a system that we would impose at the national level. That would make the assumption that everyone would have trust in and collaboration with law enforcement. That's a partnership that needs to be built.

**Ms. Lisa Hefpner:** We know that law enforcement has to be involved at certain points—many of our witnesses have said that—but on the point of the threshold, who's making these decisions? I think that is key.

Can you comment on that?

**Ms. Krista Apse:** Chair, I'll use another example.

In Washington state, an important element of the way they work is with an indigenous liaison person, who can work with the families of the person who has gone missing and play that important role of trust with local law enforcement.

There are a number of different ways to do that, and part of what we need to do now is land on the best way with partners in terms of what their needs are and what would result in trust in the system.

**The Chair:** You only have about 30 seconds left, so could you wrap it up?

**Ms. Lisa Hefpner:** Okay.

In your view—you're the experts and the officials—what would be the best way to roll out this system quickly and effectively, ensuring that there's indigenous leadership? How do you see the best way of moving forward?

• (1630)

**Ms. Valerie Gideon:** I think what the minister has signalled is that we do have some interested provinces that also see the benefit of doing that in their jurisdiction. Our advice is to proceed initially with a regional approach to work out what the possibilities are, and then bring that back to a national table with partners to reflect on how that has gone and be able to move forward in a larger way.

We have experienced where we have done this. For example, the Hope for Wellness helpline is an example of something that has existed for some time and has received some very positive feedback over time from first nations and from other indigenous peoples. It is a model that was looked at in the context of a partnership advisory committee many years ago. We've built upon that now, and it actually supports the MMIWG2S+ survivors and families. It has expanded its scope and mandate.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Gideon.

MP Larouche, you have 1.5 minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to welcome you again.

Minister, we have heard about the disappointment caused in response to the announcement in the budget of the funding allocated for implementing the red dress alert. The funding is spread out over time and is probably insufficient. As well, it has become an election promise, when it is needed now. I talked about this the last time I had the floor.

I would now like to focus on the officials and the experience they looked into, in the United States, in Washington or California.

I know that the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness has done studies on the situation of indigenous women and girls.

Have you had an opportunity to look into the experiences and recommendations in earlier reports by other committees that might be relevant when it comes to the red dress alert?

Most importantly, have you made sure that those recommendations are going to be implemented as quickly as possible? We have to do it in memory of the missing or murdered women and girls.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Due to the timeline, I'll take that question and acknowledge that we have looked at many jurisdictions that have systems in place, and we are continuing to look at them.

We've also been engaging with different regional players and partners, and the experiences are different. The experiences even with law enforcement are different. For us, it's continuous learning because, at the end of the day, we don't want to do up a system that

doesn't have the trust and that isn't being used. Ultimately, we want to be able to save lives, and that will require us to do the work properly.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Trust has to be rebuilt, Minister.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

MP Gazan, you have 1.5 minutes.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you so much.

Going back, in terms of the timelines and understanding things, especially being part of the consultations and seeing things that still need to be done, we still need timelines. I just feel that there aren't any timelines. Is there a plan to put in specific timelines, even working and negotiating with provinces?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** What I would be willing to do is to work with you on a timeline. I've been consulting a number of people on this, including you, Ms. Gazan. I would be willing to work with you on developing a timeline, along with some of the partners we work with.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Okay. I will report back to committee about whether I do get a timeline.

Thank you so much, Minister.

I want to say that I don't very often compliment folks across the way, but it has been a real pleasure working with you and the whole committee as well. Everybody on this committee, particularly Krista, is trying to push this through. Again, I want to thank the whole committee for helping to support getting this off the ground.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, MP Gazan.

That concludes our first panel.

On behalf of the committee, I'd like to also thank the minister for his appearance. As a reminder, the officials will be staying on for the second panel.

I will suspend for about two minutes while we do the transition.

Thank you.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1640)

**The Chair:** The committee will resume its meeting and the study of the implementation of the red dress alert.

We are back with our witnesses who were with us on the first panel. Welcome back, everyone.

As we did the opening remarks previously, we can just jump into the first round of questions.

MP Roberts, you have six minutes.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Before I start, I just want to make it clear that people should not be making assumptions. Karen was a great leader, but we welcome you, Shelby. I don't want you to take this from anyone here at our team. We have worked very collaboratively together. I think making assumptions is the wrong way to go. I just want to set that clear for the record. Welcome, and thank you for being part of the team.

We also want to congratulate Karen. She did a great job.

I want to start with Ms. Gideon. The minister's gone, but I would like your feedback on something.

Bill C-5 passed, receiving royal assent on June 30, 2021. The purpose of the act is to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action number 80.

I was taught as a child that actions speak louder than words. While this is a lovely sentiment, the action of the Prime Minister on the very first national day spoke volumes. Despite receiving invitations to spend the day with survivors and their families, he opted for a surfing vacation in Tofino. In my opinion, his actions spoke volumes to the importance he placed on reconciliation.

How much damage did his actions cause—

**Ms. Lisa Hepfner:** I have a point of order. I'm just wondering what this has to do with the red dress alert.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** I'm getting to that.

**The Chair:** If you could—

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** Yes.

We've been studying this for, I believe, three years. That was before my time. We know how important it is to protect all women and children, especially with what has been going on with the indigenous population and the missing and murdered indigenous women.

Leah brought this up because it is a concern. We're all women here, and we all want to fight for the same thing.

Doesn't that show disrespect to the indigenous people?

• (1645)

**Ms. Valerie Gideon:** Thank you for the question.

I am a first nation woman myself. I'm a member of Gesgapegiag and a mother of two first nation girls. I have been in the federal system now for 16 years, and I worked at the Assembly of First Nations before that. I would say that there has been a significant amount of work and progress with respect to advancing reconciliation in recent years. There has been a significant level of increased investment in programs and services, but there have also been some very significant legislative and policy initiatives that are going to entrench certain aspects of changes.

In that, I'll reference the child and family services legislation, which has now been very much validated and supported by the Supreme Court of Canada in a recent decision. It now recognizes the jurisdiction of indigenous peoples to completely take over, design and manage child and family services, which have been a significant risk factor for indigenous women and girls. It was very much highlighted with respect to the calls for justice.

Another important piece of legislation is the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which also—

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** I'm sorry to cut you off. They only give me so much time.

We've had five meetings and many witnesses. One thing they all say is that they don't feel they're being seen. I want to tell them, for the record, right now: We see you. We hear you. We're listening.

We need to do better. We're not doing better. We, as a committee, need to ensure that the government makes this red dress alert a top priority.

We had Jennifer Jesty from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. I'm not sure if you know her. She was able to get a system in place in a matter of days. We heard her testimony, and it was unbelievable. It wasn't about money or anything. She got it done.

Why is the government taking so long to take action on a very vital situation in which women are going missing?

**Ms. Valerie Gideon:** In my experience, when the federal government rushes in to impose a solution on indigenous peoples, it does not work. The reason why the initiative in Cape Breton worked is that it was driven by the grassroots and by the local communities. They designed it. They managed it. They chose the technological provider. They set the parameters. This is what we are trying to emulate at a national level by taking the time to engage with indigenous peoples, which are not homogenous across the country; they are very diverse. That is the richness of the work we are doing to advance reconciliation.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** Ms. Gideon, I think the issue here, and I don't know if you'll agree with me or not, is that there's so much waste and so much red tape, when we have a system in place that could start immediately to help find these missing indigenous women before they are murdered. How do we do that if we're going to continue to do studies and reports? Enough is enough. We have to stop with the talk, and we have to get it done. I come from the private sector. If my boss came to me and said, "Here's an issue", I would make sure to act on it right away.

This is serious. We're all women here. We can't continue to lose our women because without us there wouldn't be a world.

**Ms. Valerie Gideon:** We have multiple bosses; we don't have one boss. We have many different indigenous representatives and service delivery organizations that have a lot to say about this issue and about how they will see it succeed. We do need to provide forums for them to bring forward those recommendations to us.

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

MP Lambropoulos, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

First of all, congratulations to you on this new role. I really wish you the best in the role.

I also want to say a big thank you to Karen Vecchio, who was an incredible chair for over six years on this committee. She led a very collaborative committee where all parties worked together in order to advance the cause of women in so many different ways. I really hope that we can continue that great work.

It doesn't say anything about you, Shelby; I don't know what's in store. I'm hoping that the removal of Karen as chair wasn't symbolic, but she was one of the members in the Conservative Party who cared more than anyone about women and girls, so I am sad to see her taken away from the committee.

Having said that, I have nothing against you. I actually like you, and I'm really hoping we can work together collaboratively.

On this important study, thank you to our witnesses for being here and for doing what they can to advance this cause. It's obviously a very important cause. We've heard from many indigenous women across the country on this study so far. We've heard what a red dress alert should look like. It should be led by indigenous women, and the decision-making table should include indigenous women. I've heard from you today that this is the case, that our indigenous partners are the ones who are taking the lead here and that we're consulting with as many as possible. That's great to hear.

One of the main concerns that we've spoken about at various meetings, so far, is the fact that police need to be involved in a red dress alert and in this situation. We've heard mixed reviews because there are some indigenous women who don't want police involvement because of the lack of trust that exists between indigenous communities and the police in different parts of the country.

We've also heard from different indigenous women that police are required because they do have the tools necessary to be able to help in these situations. In the calls for justice, it is specifically mentioned that there should be policies that are national in scope, so there should be police departments across the country that are following the same policies and the same guidelines in order to make sure that cases are taken seriously when it comes to missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.

Can you speak to that in terms of any work being done on that front? I'm thinking Public Safety, most likely, would be able to answer this question. Is any work being done to standardize protocols to work with police chiefs across the country to make sure there is something being done in this regard?

• (1650)

**Ms. Kenza El Bied:** Thank you for the question. It's going to be an awkward response, because I'm responsible for emergency management. When we're talking about policing, it is under another umbrella within Public Safety, and unfortunately they are not part of this table at this stage.

I hear your point. I hear your concerns, and your point is very valid. We can take it back to our colleagues, and then we can follow

up with a written response on that front, on what Public Safety is doing in that part of the work.

**Ms. Valerie Gideon:** I can maybe just add that there has been an increased amount of work that Public Safety has done through new investments with respect to establishing trilateral agreements with communities with respect to policing, as well as increasing the number of self-administered police services among first nations and Inuit. There have been 93 new and ongoing projects in that regard, as well as investments in police infrastructure. I think this is improving relationships over time. More needs to be done, for sure, but it is a very important priority of a number of first nations.

If we can potentially look at some of these self-administered police agreements that exist in some jurisdictions, start in regions that have those types of relationships and actually bring that forward to chiefs of police across the country, I'm sure there would be openness to look at the types of protocols and the relationship building that's happened.

Krista also talked about Washington, where they have a navigator, a steward or someone who can advocate within the context with police services directly, to have a bit of an interlocutor role and to enable a safer and more transparent environment. I think it is about transparency as well, with respect to what's happening in police services when these alerts are issued.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Can anyone tell me if there have been any conversations with provinces and territories with regard to this?

Of course, when they're self-governed, it's great. That's obviously a great step, but of course, most police services are of a provincial jurisdiction. Are there conversations with provinces in order to keep them up to date with what's going on and with what the requests are? Are there any conversations of that nature going on?

• (1655)

**Ms. Krista Apse:** The bottom line is yes. Those conversations are going on. The minister mentioned the national indigenous provincial, federal and territorial round table that happened at the beginning of February. The whole first day was dedicated to technical discussions around the red dress alert. Not only provinces and territories, but also indigenous partners were very active in those discussions. The minister described that there were several ministers present from the provinces and territories, or deputies. If not present in person, they were participating virtually.

We regularly interact, as officials, with all the provinces and territories as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Thanks.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

Thank you to the officials for being with us today.

We realize how truly unanimous opinion around the table is and we are very happy to have them here, to try to move forward on this issue.

We have hit a dead end, and I am trying to see how we can manage to unravel the knot or get out of this dead end. As was said earlier, on the one hand, this project has to be carried out by and for indigenous people, but on the other hand, there does have to be help from police services.

As the minister himself said, the main factor in the hold-up is the lack of trust on the part of the communities. How can that be remedied?

Apart from all that, what are you doing to ensure that the indigenous communities regain their trust in the police services, so that the alerts are representative of the needs and requests of the communities and they can call on the police services?

What efforts are being made to rebuild this relationship of trust between police services and the communities, to unravel the knot? It seems that this is where the hold-up is.

**Ms. Valerie Gideon:** It is a factor to be considered.

I would say that of the models we have looked at, several offer flexibility. For example, it would be the communities that would decide whether they want to be involved in the alert system or not. The system would not be imposed.

If we move ahead and we choose that kind of flexible model, it would enable us to build trust within the communities. That does not mean that a majority of the communities would participate in it, but a number of communities might be very open to the idea of considering it, as long as they are allowed to participate in defining the parameters, management of the system is transparent, and indigenous voices are part of the governance of the model.

It is not a system that would be completely developed outside the communities, without the help of indigenous peoples. In fact, we would not consider a model like that. What is needed is to make sure the communities have that flexibility, to say whether they choose to participate in the system or not. They should be able to withdraw from the project if they see something or a situation that is of concern to them.

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** We have heard about the round tables. The Government of Canada held an initial round table on January 10, 2023, to discuss the situation of missing or murdered indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQ+ persons.

Has another date been set for a second round table, to get things moving and rebuild the relationship of trust?

**Ms. Valerie Gideon:** We held a second round table in February 2024. The minister talked about that. A full day was devoted to discussions about this particular problem. We received feedback and excellent comments there. That was also the first time people were able to directly hear the views of your colleagues, who facilitated these mobilization sessions, and talk about what they had heard.

The objective was also to make sure that all aspects of the problem and all of the stakeholders' interests had been taken into consideration so we could start working on implementing the alert.

We have funding to continue to hold round tables like these. A lot of working groups have also been set up, and there are other consultation processes. The round tables are not the only ways of getting the perspective of indigenous peoples. These efforts will enable us to try to build a consensus and have very specific discussions about implementing the project.

• (1700)

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** So there have been two round tables held.

I would now like to talk about another aspect. We heard that a continuum of services needed to be established in addition to the red dress alert. That alert must not be seen as the solution that will fix all the problems like some sort of magic wand.

Are you also collaborating with other departments so that you can work on prevention and education, upstream of the problem?

In addition, are you also thinking about the measures and resources that are needed so that after an alert, the law is enforced and services are offered to support the victims?

To summarize, is there a process for looking at what measures need to be taken and what services need to be offered upstream and downstream, in addition to the red dress alert?

**Ms. Valerie Gideon:** Yes, for example, there is the national action plan, which addresses all the systemic aspects of the problem along with all the necessary programs and services.

In fact, we were very pleased to see that our colleagues at Indigenous Services Canada have had their budget resources renewed, particularly when it comes to mental health services and children's and family services. They have also received funding to combat racism in the health care system.

Those investments will contribute to supporting families and victims while at the same time strengthening prevention.

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** I am going to conclude by saying that the money too often stays in the coffers. Funding is announced, but it never makes it onto the ground.

**Ms. Valerie Gideon:** The money that was allocated in the 2024 budget is not money that our department can spend as federal spending. Those funds have to be used in connection with contribution agreements with partners.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

MP Gazan.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you so much.

I want to go back to the dead zones. You're from Public Safety. This is a safety issue. We've known that this issue has been happening for many years in indigenous communities. There have been some federal initiatives around improving connectivity. We are now talking about a red dress alert. Some communities will be prevented from even participating, because their human right to equal access to communications is still being violated. What is your department doing to address this very serious gap?

Respond quickly, if possible. I have a couple of questions.

Thank you.

**Mr. Arjun Vinodrai:** I'll start.

Certainly it is an issue that comes up in many conversations with regard to emergency management and public safety. We work very closely with our colleagues at Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. They lead on issues related to coverage. It is an issue we are regularly working with them on.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** That answer, for me, is not satisfactory. We were talking about this in Manitoba in literally the 1990s. It's 2024.

When we listened to testimony from folks who are from the Highway of Tears, they indicated very clearly that if a woman goes missing, there are zones where they can't even call for help, should they get the chance. Once they're gone, it's over. This is costing lives.

I know my colleague, Ms. Ferreri, brought this up.

I've asked for timelines for the red dress alert. What is the timeline for this? Is it going to take another 40 years? We know the tragic stories about the Highway of Tears. What is the timeline to ensure that everybody across Canada has access to that human right, including those living in remote areas?

**Ms. Kenza El Bied:** I think this is a question that we need to really work on with ISED. This is not under the Public Safety responsibility. I'm afraid to say that. I hear your point. The timelines are so critical. Let us take this one back, and we'll follow up on that.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I would like to request a written response.

**Ms. Kenza El Bied:** Yes.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I have another question as well.

We've been working on the red dress alert for about a year with consultations. It certainly involves Public Safety. It seems, in the committee.... I don't know if your departments are collaborating. You're a big part of making this happen quickly. I'm wondering where the discussions are between your departments to make sure we can get a red dress alert out in a timely way.

• (1705)

**Ms. Kenza El Bied:** We have been having conversations with our colleagues, with CIRNAC, on this issue for a long time. Public Safety's responsibility is related to—

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Can you please define “long time”?

**Ms. Kenza El Bied:** I don't have an exact date, but what I would say is that since the work started on this issue, we have been working with our colleagues at CIRNAC. What we are providing, from

the Public Safety perspective, is the technical support. We are not the lead.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I'm sorry. I share this with all respect, but we've asked technical questions in the committee today, and it seems that we're not getting a lot of answers. That technical piece is the difference between this being viable and not viable, in addition to consultations.

How much time do I have, Chair?

**The Chair:** You have two minutes.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I'll move on to Ms. Gideon.

I spoke to the minister about the time to get this right. In another committee, it was around amending EI to include kinship and adoptive care. You spoke about the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We know that in Bill C-15, one of the stipulations was that all legislation going forward has to be consistent with articles in UNDRIP. On several occasions, I have had to try to amend legislation in committee. On this occasion, I did the same thing. It passed in our HUMA committee, and the government overturned my amendments, which would have allowed it to be compatible.

What is your department doing to ensure that it's following the rule of law with Bill C-15, which now informs part of our rule of law?

**Ms. Valerie Gideon:** In terms of the United Nations declaration act, CIRNAC has a lead or a co-lead role on a number of the action plan measures. We are also responsible for looking at pieces of legislation within the context of our department that would be within the purview of CIRNAC to identify areas where we would see the need for amendment. Any new legislative initiative would actually have to pass a review to ensure that it is compatible with the United Nations declaration act. We have developed a tool within our department in order to be able to do that, and we have training sessions as well.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** The action plan was supposed to be released within two years. We're now almost four years out. You're still developing a tool. When is that tool going to be complete?

**Ms. Valerie Gideon:** We have the tool within the context of our department to ensure that our staff across our department are equipped to understand how to do a review of legislation or policy items that they are putting forward. We have that developed.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

MP Ferreri, in the nature of time, it was originally five minutes, but we need to shrink it down to three.

Thank you.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, again, to the witnesses here chatting about the red dress alert and implementing it.

We have the officials here today because there is consensus regarding this red dress alert, but we're trying to nail down the technical issues. There seems to be a little frustration with not getting answers today.



Blue Sky Net has found that of the 285 northern Ontario communities, only 74 had at least 50% of their households able to access 50/10 megabytes per second high-speed Internet equal to 26% of northern Ontario communities. The same report found that of the 187 communities with a population under 1,000, only 41 have at least half of households able to access a standard rate of speed.

The Minister of Rural Economic Development has spent \$7.6 billion since 2015 to improve high-speed Internet access in under-served communities, but even if you get access—which we see in the Auditor General's report that you don't have—Canada still has the highest cellphone bills when compared to other countries. If you have service and you can't afford it, you might as well not have it.

There's a major gap here. They're called dead zones and they're literally dead zones for women who go missing.

My question for Public Safety is this: You're saying here today that this isn't necessarily your file, but how would you fix this? How would you go back and say, "Okay, we need to work with another ministry to ensure that this happens," and put that on a timeline? For taxpayers watching at home, can you tell us what happens in that process? What happens so that you get, "Okay, I'm going to go talk to this ministry to ensure that this happens"?"

• (1710)

**Ms. Valerie Gideon:** Madam Chair, if I may, I would like to take the question because part of CIRNAC's role is to ensure that we produce annual progress updates with respect to the federal pathway that include all federal actions relating to the calls for justice in which the federal government is implicated.

As part of that exercise, we do have an update on call for justice 16.5, which is relevant here. As of December 2023, the universal broadband fund, which is led by Innovation, Science and Economic Development, is on track to exceed its goal of providing access to high-speed Internet to 98% of Canadian households by 2026 and to 100% by 2030.

I personally have also had deputy minister-level conversations with ISED to see how we could engage with other provincial-territorial jurisdictions, where they have identified areas of risk, to see how we could expedite cell tower establishment, just as was done along the Highway of Tears, which involved a collaboration with the provincial government and ISED in order to be able to fund 12 new cellphone towers.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Thank you.

We're out of time, but I just want to say that the AG report does not sync with what you're saying in terms of what has been delivered.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Gideon and Ms. Ferreri.

MP Damoff, you have three minutes.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you, Shelby.

I want to start by saying something that is not directed at you.

I do find it unfortunate that the current Conservative leader has removed a smart, competent, progressive Conservative woman as the chair.

It makes me sad, because Karen Vecchio has given her heart and soul to this committee. She was on the committee for nine years, seven as chair. I served for the first four years on FEWO with Karen. We did important studies. The very first bill studied by the status of women committee was Rona Ambrose's bill on sexual assault, and last year, I know for a fact, Keira's law would not have passed if it hadn't been for Karen's leadership.

She has relationships with women's groups across Canada. She has ensured that trauma-informed questions are asked, not only at this committee but at others, and she's always worked with women's safety and well-being ahead of any partisan interest.

I have no doubt that will continue under your leadership, Chair, but I do want to thank Karen, from the bottom of my heart, for her leadership and for all that she's done for the women of Canada.

Thank you, Karen.

My questions are for Public Safety. I'm the former parliamentary secretary for Public Safety and I find it really disturbing that you come here and say that you're not the lead on this.

You are emergency management, and I do feel that Public Safety really needs to start engaging in this more and taking this seriously, because a lot of what we need to do when it comes to the alert system rests with you. There's only so much that Crown-Indigenous Relations can do, and I'm really grateful that Marc Miller and Gary Anandasangaree have taken the lead on this, but it's time that Public Safety did as well.

Pelmorex has shown me their system. They're located in Oakville. If we wanted to add the red dress alert tomorrow, to Michelle's point, it could be done. They issue the alerts but they don't determine who does. It's a bit of a secret committee, this SOREM committee.

Can you tell us who's on that committee? Are there any indigenous people or are there any first nations police services on that committee?

**Ms. Kenza El Bied:** SOREM is the senior officials responsible for emergency management, and the members are representatives from provincial and territorial jurisdictions. They are all responsible—most of them—for emergency management. What we are discussing through SOREM is a conversation that we have been leading around the national public alert system.

This is what SOREM is responsible—

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** My time is up.

Pelmorex also has an app that doesn't rely on cellphone service. I don't know if you're familiar with this.

Could you please send us a list of who is on SOREM? I don't know if the committee may want to bring them as witnesses.

• (1715)

**Ms. Kenza El Bied:** Actually, we are in the process of providing a one-pager on what SOREM does, the mandate and the membership. This is going to be sent to the committee members by next Tuesday.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Next we have Madame Larouche for one minute, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. El Bied, to conclude, I would like to address the question of the trilateral agreements that were referred to earlier.

How are you going to make sure these agreements work? What more might they provide in relation to the red dress alert?

**Ms. Kenza El Bied:** We have not yet signed any agreements, but we are working closely not only with our federal partners, but also with our provincial and territorial partners.

Since Indigenous Services Canada is responsible for the red dress alert, we are working closely with our colleagues in that department to see how we can move this project forward and put it in place.

It is not up to the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness by itself to determine the process of putting this alert in place. Rather, we are working in collaboration with all our partners.

[*English*]

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

Last, we have MP Gazan for one minute.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you.

Chair, I'd like to put forward a motion:

That the committee thank MP Vecchio for her years of service as chair of this committee.

I'd like to table that and to release the witnesses.

**The Chair:** Witnesses, we thank you very much for being here.

There is a motion on the table. Is the committee in agreement to adopt it?

**An hon. member:** Do we want to talk about it?

**The Chair:** Technically, it wasn't submitted 48 hours in advance. Is it the will of the committee?

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** It's with the will of the committee.

**The Chair:** We're going to suspend for a few minutes and figure out what the next step is.

• (1715)

(Pause)

• (1715)

**The Chair:** As you know, routine motions generally need 48 hours' notice, interpreted as two nights, for any substantive motion to be moved in committee.

It's not a contentious motion. The motion has been put on notice. Can we ask for unanimous consent from the committee to move the motion?

• (1720)

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** Chair, can I add something?

We've all spoken on it.

I'm not sure where we're going with this motion, Leah. Everybody has thanked Karen. We all miss her. What is the purpose of the motion?

Could she explain it?

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Do we have unanimous consent?

I'm sorry. I'm just asking this procedurally.

**The Chair:** We don't have unanimous consent.

I'll start a list, if we have speakers for it.

Leah.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I wanted to move this motion because, like other members, I was very troubled by the decision of the Conservative Party to remove Karen Vecchio. I share this not because of the Conservative Party, although I have much to share about the Conservative Party, as you know. I share this because there is a culture in this House of Commons that demoralizes and excludes the voices of particularly strong women. Karen Vecchio, I have had the privilege to get to know....

Before I go on, I want to be really clear for the new chair: I think you're lovely. I welcome the new chair to the committee. I want you to feel safe. I don't want what I have to say make you feel unsafe. That's very important to me. I really mean that.

I'm putting this motion forward because I think women need to stand up for women in this place. Karen took the time to get know me as a friend, but, particularly, really listened to some of the issues that are very marginalized in this House and, I would say, particularly issues surrounding indigenous women.

Prior to my being elected in 2019, indigenous women were pretty much off the radar after the national inquiry. If it hadn't been for me pushing, along with the NDP, along with powerful women across party lines, as we have seen with the red dress study...without the level of passion that I have seen around this committee table, we would still be dying in the streets.

Inclusion and exclusion are intentional. I am really troubled that the voice of a woman who is highly respected by women across the country has been taken off the committee; a woman who was able to work across party lines so that this place, this committee, could be one of the only safe places in the House for women. This doesn't feel safe to me any more. This doesn't feel safe to me: that if parties see strong women in committees who threaten a political agenda, we can be silenced. That's how the right to choose gets threatened. That's how the rights of trans women get threatened.

This is the only place we have to lift up our voices to protect each other. I have gotten to know people around this table, and I consider you colleagues and friends.

I am so touched by the red dress study, and I am so touched by the work Karen did in working as the chair to make sure that we heard what we needed to hear to advance this quickly. We are literally dying in this country: That's how critical this committee is.

I don't feel as alone in the House of Commons, because I've worked across party lines with every single woman in this room. They have my back. I'm going to have Karen's back this time. I'm going to stand up for Karen Vecchio. I'm going to stand up for Karen Vecchio and give the middle finger to partisan politics and political posturing, including by the Conservative Party right now, which gave the middle finger, as far as I'm concerned, to a functioning committee that is fighting for our rights.

Shelby, you are lovely. Again, I don't think you're going to do a bad job. I think you're going to be fantastic. I think you're fair. You are a diplomat. You are lovely. I want to be very clear that what I'm saying is no reflection of your competence or of your not being welcomed.

This is why I'm saying that I hope what I'm saying doesn't make you feel unsafe, because you know what, Shelby? I will have your back. If you do things that step out of line, like fighting for reproductive rights or trans women, I'm going to have your back.

● (1725)

I'm going to have your back because I know that our voices in this House are really minimized. I'm going to fight for this. There are hills you have to die on. For me, this is a hill we...

This is probably one of the only places I feel safe in this place—what I've called a misogynistic, racist, colonial shithole. This is especially as a minority woman—one of 10 indigenous people in this place—in a seat that I was never supposed to be in. I feel like my safety has been violated by another colonial violent act. It was a misogynistic act by the Conservative Party against Karen Vecchio.

The other day, I was wondering, “Where's Karen?” I don't know what happened; I don't know what led to this. She's a colleague, and she's also a sister. We're sisters in this circle.

After almost every meeting, I leave here and feel hopeful. I'm so hopeful that maybe some of the reasons I came here and maybe some of the people who want me to fight for issues.... I'm hopeful that maybe it can happen because I see what we do around this table. They have violated that trust. This is a place that is known to be unsafe for women. Women in politics get harassed every day in the House of Commons. It's a place where we have said things in

confidence and upheld each other's confidence. I don't know what that's going to be like now.

Now, I have a wonderful relationship with every Conservative member on this committee, including you, Shelby. I have good relationships with all of the Liberal members. I have a wonderful relationship with Andréanne Larouche. Do you know why? When I come into this committee room, it's my place to stand up for us as women. It's not just for women's rights. It's for putting studies out that people feel proud of.

I was so proud of this committee when, under the leadership of Karen Vecchio, we put forward a study on the connection between resource extraction and increased violence against indigenous women and girls. That's something that some of the men might have found to be really controversial. However, we made it really clear that this wasn't about resource extraction. Whether you agreed with resource extraction or not, this was about how they need to stop raping women in indigenous communities and how companies need to be held accountable.

We stood up for women. We stood up for women instead of big oil companies with big resource-extraction money, companies that are making money off the backs of indigenous women. We stood up for that. Maybe that's controversial for some of the parties in this House—I would say the Conservative Party, certainly.

I'm talking about the Conservative Party specifically because I'm really disgusted by what transpired with regard to my friend, my honourable colleague, Karen Vecchio. It's garbage that, any time a woman stands with her sisters against violence, on studies like oil extraction, it's seen as rebellious and radical—like somehow the raping of women isn't rebellious and radical. Somehow, we have to turn a blind eye because we don't want to tick off big industry.

This is concerning to me. I don't know where this committee is going to go. Are we going to let toxic masculinity pollute this committee?

I'm not talking to you, Shelby. I'm speaking in general. I want to be really clear that it's not about you, Shelby. It's about the broader issues and the systemic issues within the House of Commons.

Any time women join hands and say no to violence, are we going to be punished? We know that some of the studies we've done in this committee have been pretty edgy. Even in studies where people had different opinions, we came out the other way. What does that say—throwing Karen Vecchio out? Who's going to be next?

Are we going to have to listen, mostly to men in leadership in the House of Commons, or else the girls are in big trouble in this misogynistic place?

• (1730)

I'm sorry I'm taking up so much time, but this is a bigger issue to me than just Karen; this is about the fact that there used to be—and I hope we have it again—a cross-party women's committee where women supported women in this place. I'm waiting for the day that a trans woman is in this place, and we're not passing motions that threaten their safety—not just outside but in the House of Commons—by the Conservatives. Karen Vecchio supported trans folk, by the way. I worry that some of her progressive decisions impacted her ability to safely stay on the committee when she stood up for human rights.

These are the most critical issues of our time. We see 12-year-olds in the States having to give birth because they can't access safe, trauma-informed abortion care. These topics are scary in the House of Commons, and even in this committee, because everybody is worried they're going to get in trouble, but not me, and not my party; we're clearly pro-choice.

I've never done this before, but I'm going to stand up for Karen, because if any of you get in trouble in this committee, I want to let you all know that I will have your back. I will fight hard. I am a huge defender of women's rights, and I will fight hard for all of you because you deserve that solidarity. I'm going to show that solidarity to Karen. She didn't deserve what happened to her because of some of her progressive views, including having to deal with, as the chair—

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, Leah, but I think we should just go to the vote.

**A voice:** No, you can't. There are hands up.

**The Clerk:** We have a running list right now, and it was by unanimous consent, so we can't go to a vote. We can choose to resume at the next meeting. There are a couple of options on the table.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** No. Other people are on the speaking list. We can adjourn and then continue on—

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** We cannot adjourn, but maybe we can suspend.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** We can suspend, and then continue on after. I'm fine with that.

**A voice:** I agree.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Okay. Did you want to speak first before we adjourn?

**The Chair:** In that event, we'll need a motion to suspend, and there will need to be a vote on that motion.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I'm sorry, Chair. I won't be here at next week's meeting, but I would like to speak, and I don't know where I am on the list.

**The Chair:** You're about the sixth down.

We need a motion should we wish to suspend.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** I so move.

[Translation]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Can we call a vote, Madam Chair?

[English]

**The Clerk:** We're just going to vote on the motion to suspend.

• (1735)

[Translation]

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** I would just like to be sure on one point.

[English]

If we suspend, it means that we will start again at the beginning at the next meeting. Is that correct?

**The Chair:** Yes.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 9; nays 1)

[The meeting was suspended at 5:36 p.m., Thursday, April 18]

[The meeting resumed at 11:04 a.m., Tuesday, April 30]

• (29900)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting to order.

We're resuming meeting 105 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

On avoiding audio feedback, before we begin, a few things have changed. I would like to remind all members and other meeting participants in the room of the following important preventative measures.

To prevent disruption and potentially harmful audio feedback incidents that can cause injuries, all in-person participants are reminded to keep their earpieces away from the microphones at all times. As indicated in the communiqué from the Speaker to all members on Monday, April 29, the following measures have been taken to help prevent audio feedback incidents.

All earpieces have been replaced with a model that greatly reduces the probability of audio feedback. The new earpieces are black whereas the former earpieces were grey. Please use a only black, approved earpiece. By default, all unused earpieces will be unplugged at the start of the meeting. When you are not using your earpiece, please place it face down in the middle of the sticker for that purpose that you will find on the table as indicated.

Please consult the cards on the table for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents.

The room layout has also been adjusted to increase the distance between microphones and reduce the chance of feedback from an ambient earpiece. These measures are in place so we can conduct our business without interruption and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters.

Thank you for your co-operation.

I would also like to make a few comments for the benefit of the members.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. All comments shall be addressed through the chair.

As everyone is aware, we suspended the debate on Ms. Gazan's motion at the last meeting. We are now ready to resume the debate on that motion.

The text of the motion is as follows:

That the committee thank MP Vecchio for her years of service as chair of the committee.

Before we start, I would like to inform the members of the list that we had ongoing from the last meeting. The current speaking list is: Dominique Vien, Anna Roberts, Michelle Ferreri, Anita Vandenberg and Pam Damoff. Since Pam is not here today, she is not on the list.

Please let me know if you would like your name added to or taken off the list.

• (29905)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.):** Madam Chair, may I have my name added to the list?

**The Chair:** Fine.

[*English*]

Would anybody else like to be added or taken off?

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** You can remove me.

**The Chair:** Okay, Anna Roberts is removed.

**Ms. Lisa Hepfner:** Is this a one-time offer or, if we hear something, can we jump in?

**The Chair:** I reckon it will be a fluid list.

MP Gazan had the floor.

You can carry on, should you wish, or we can pass it to Dominique.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** You can pass it, Chair. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Dominique, the floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first comments are for Ms. Gazan to thank her for moving this motion, which is entirely appropriate. It is to thank our esteemed colleague Karen Vecchio for her years of service in the position of chair of this committee. It is very well deserved.

I have also had the privilege of being her shadow minister, as we say in our parliamentary jargon, and I have seen what a dedicated woman and exemplary member she is, one who is valued by all parliamentary colleagues, particularly those who sit on our committee.

I would like Ms. Gazan's motion to be put to the vote, Madam Chair, without our having to spend a lot of time on it. If Ms. Vecchio were here, she would agree with me. I know her well enough to say that. What time we take to talk about this motion will be to say that we support it and we are ready to vote.

That is time we will not have for discussing some very important subjects, such as the study we are doing on the red dress alert. That study is also very dear to the heart of our colleague Leah Gazan, with good reason. The alert will mean that a process can be put in place, a system to protect indigenous women and girls, in particular, from dangers we want to see them protected against.

Thank you, Madam Chair. We observed your ability to bounce back and your sense of duty at our most recent meeting. We are familiar with your goodwill. I know you too. You are serious, dedicated and determined, and I am confident that you will be able to move the discussions along on the very important subjects we tackle here.

And so, colleagues, I am pleading with you this morning. Let us not make this motion a springboard for purely partisan and political discussions. Let us use this motion to say how much we value Ms. Vecchio and her work as a member of Parliament. We sincerely thank her for the work she has done.

Let us not go off on tangents that take us far away from what the motion is all about.

• (29910)

[*English*]

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

Next, we have Michelle Ferreri.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Thanks, Madam Chair, but I really don't have anything further to add than what my colleague just said, so that's great.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Anita.

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

I want to add my voice. I didn't have a speaking slot at the last meeting, so I didn't get a chance to thank Karen Vecchio for her tremendous amount of work on this committee. I've been on this committee; I was here for two years, before she was chair, when Marilyn Gladu was chair and did a wonderful job, but for the last three years as well, with Karen as chair. My understanding is since she became chair in 2017, our committee has done 45 reports. That is phenomenal, if you want to compare that to every other committee. The amount of work, the effectiveness and, I would say, the fairness with which she chaired this committee is something I think many other committees in this place could look to as an example.

I did want to say, today, that I have concerns. I am very worried about the committee, but not because of you, Shelby. I want to be very clear that I think every one of us is very proud of the work we've done and wants to work very hard to fight to keep this a space that does not give in to the toxicity we see in other parts of Parliament and in other committees.

However, I do think that the Leader of the Opposition has been putting out a narrative that Parliament is broken, that democracy is broken, that Parliament is dysfunctional and that government members are so degenerate that there's no possibility of coming to consensus.

The way Karen chaired this committee is living, breathing proof that is not true. Every day that this committee was able to bring voices of women and girls, voices of non-binary and gender-diverse people who are not heard, and voices of victims and survivors, and work collaboratively with true respect and even friendship across party lines, we proved that Parliament can be functional, that Parliament is functioning and that democracy does work. I truly think that by removing Karen Vecchio as chair.... Pierre Poilievre had to destroy that because it defies his narrative that Parliament is not working.

I'm imploring you, Shelby, because I think, right now.... I've done governance work for decades and worked with parliaments here and around the world, and it is about incentives. It is about what's punished and what's rewarded. Every one of us comes to this place wanting to do good. I don't think there's a person who puts their name on a ballot who isn't doing so because they want to make Canada a better place, particularly the women here who want to do good and bring voices of women into the halls of power in this place, where we have been absent for too many generations.

However, once here, what happens is the incentives are against collaboration. This is a very partisan place. The structure and the very way in which it is formed is based on two swords' lengths. It was created 150-some years ago. It was created by men, and it has been a very aggressive, very male-dominated place. Lately, there's been a toxicity that has come into our politics, whether it's here in Parliament or outside.

What Karen was able to do very effectively as chair was to keep that out. Whether it was through wedge issues, ambush motions that are meant to hijack agendas, the “gotcha” clips on social media or the character assassination that we sometimes see in our political discourse, she kept that out of this committee, and she was punished for it.

Shelby, it wasn't just about Karen. It was about learning lessons. It was about teaching that collaboration and bringing voices of women is something that is not to be rewarded. I think the lessons I would really hope you learn are the lessons from this committee of the last number of years. I do believe very strongly that you want this committee to work, and we will support that.

All members of this committee, and we've seen all the members speaking, will support you to make sure that what Karen did is continued: Instead of listening to the voice of any one member of this committee, she listened to the voices of the witnesses and the voices of the women who came here and needed us to give them space. We will support you in making sure you continue to do that.

● (29915)

However, it is an uphill battle because of the way this place is. I was a staffer here in 2002. I was in the Liberal research bureau for the democracy caucus when committee chairs were voted to be elected. For those of you who don't remember, this was 22 years

ago. There was a motion of Parliament that was opposed by the government of the day, the Chrétien government, but supported by backbench Liberals and opposition members. They created the election of committee chairs hoping to bring in a whole new era where committees would truly be independent and autonomous, and that the chairs would truly be independent of their parties—whatever party that was.

Sadly, over the years, I think all of us know that's become a little bit of a rubber stamp. Yes, we elect committee chairs, but it's pretty much the whips, the House leaders and the leaders who decide who those chairs are. Because of that, the chairs are beholden to those whips, House leaders and leaders—whatever party it is. With that incentive structure it can easily be abused.

I would like to do something positive today and come up with some ideas on how we change, as women.... We've been able to do it here despite the way that Parliament is structured in this sort of very aggressive and partisan way.

As women, I think we need to—maybe this committee, maybe the all-party women's caucus—go back to look at some ideas of how committee chairs are selected so that what happened to Karen doesn't happen....

In the Quebec legislature, they actually have a double majority for committee chairs—a majority of government members and a majority of opposition members. If you can't get both sides to agree, then, at that point you cannot be the chair, so the incentive is for the chair to be fair to both sides, like what we're hoping you'll do and like what Karen did.

We had a Conservative motion in 2012—I think it was by Brad Trost—that committee chairs should be elected by the entire Parliament, the same way the Speaker is elected, with a preferential ballot before committees are even set. That way, committees and the chairs would be chosen by all of us, not by the leadership or the whips.

I think it would be really good for us as women, who have really given a space to other women to be able to be heard in Parliament, to champion those kinds of changes, because I think it is really important that what happened here does not happen ever again.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Marc.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I too want to thank Ms. Gazan for moving the motion. I also want to thank Ms. Vien. I understand what she is saying. I do not want to make a speech, and I am not going to take a lot of time. I would just like to say a few words, obviously, to thank Ms. Vecchio.

As well, I want to offer my congratulations to Ms. Kramp-Neuman for her appointment as chair of the committee.

Madam Chair, we have some things in common.

[English]

Your father was an MP and my father was an MP. Daryl, your late father, passed away in February—my sympathies to you and your family. I know it was just recently. My father passed away too. I know you've lived in politics, and you understand the nature of working together and collaborating, so I'm looking forward to your being the chair here.

Obviously, as indicated in the past here from other members, there are some concerns about how we elect chairs, and that's something we maybe could address later on. I've been on this committee now since 2015. Marilyn Gladu was the first chair, and then obviously Karen came on. As indicated earlier, it's really something that we should be proud of.

● (29920)

[Translation]

We have done a lot of work here. We have had something like 50 meetings. I think it is important to take time to thank Ms. Vecchio for the way she supported all members of the committee, including me. That is why I wanted to speak today.

Ms. Vecchio did exceptional work that was based on her understanding of the issues and her desire to make changes to improve the lives of women across Canada. That was really important to her. She worked hard and she will be much missed on the committee. If my calculations are correct, she actually chaired this committee for seven years.

Ms. Vecchio showed leadership and encouraged collaboration here on the committee. We really want to keep going on that path, Madam Chair. There is no doubt about that. There is no toxic work atmosphere here on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

[English]

In the past when Karen would do some sessions here on the Hill, she would always mention how proud she was of every member of this committee. She would say that for all of the women in the status of women committee, and Marc. She would always just add that little caveat, so I'll miss her greatly. I think she's the only person who called me Marky-Marky.

**The Chair:** Can I call you that?

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Okay. You can too.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Marc Serré:** We will dearly miss Karen. You know too, Shelby, the sacrifices Karen has made, and her husband, Mike, and their five children. She has done tremendous work as a parliamentarian, and obviously in the work we're doing here for women's rights and women's empowerment, and involving men in our conversation. I always have my moosehide on my 15 jackets, getting men involved in the fight to support women. Even in 2024, there's a lot more work to be done.

I just want to say thank you, Karen. Hopefully, you're listening. A big hug to you and your family. We'll see you across the aisle in question period and hopefully in other committees.

[Translation]

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** Emmanuella.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** I'll be quick, because I already congratulated you, Shelby, and I already said that I'm sad that Karen is gone. But I've reflected a little bit.

I think the only thing I want on the record is that this place, Parliament Hill, is a very difficult place for women to be, because it is a male-dominated area, and I don't appreciate when women are just tossed aside and replaced because of a difference of opinion or because they stood up for something they believed in or because they were doing their job. I can't say for sure, but I'm pretty sure that's what happened in this case. It's sad to see it happen to a fellow woman parliamentarian who has given her all for this place and for the benefit of all the women we've fought so hard for on this committee.

I just wanted to say that. I've been here on Parliament Hill for seven years, and it has been a struggle. I am sure all parties deal with this, and all women in all parties deal with this, but it's hard to see it happen to somebody who was so collaborative and who really helped move the dial forward for women across the country. That's all.

Karen, you will be greatly missed. I am really sad this has happened.

Shelby, I really hope we can continue the great work we've been doing on this committee, but we should be standing up for each other when these things happen. If it happens to one woman, it can happen to all women. When we move backwards in circumstances such as these, well, it's a really dangerous step in the wrong direction. It could be slippery and it could lead to more and more women getting treated this way.

I just wanted that on the record. I think we should be standing up for each other, no matter who it happens to or when it happens. Unfortunately, it happens to women more often than it happens to men, even though we're a minority in this place.

● (29925)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Andréanne.

[Translation]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I had quickly thanked Ms. Vecchio last week. I will also be brief, but I wanted to do it again. Since 2019 when I was elected, I have worked with Ms. Vecchio on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. When I initially accepted this role, I was well aware that it was not a priority committee, unfortunately. Status of women issues are often seen as secondary, as less important.

These issues were my sole concern. First, I was happy to be appointed as status of women critic, within the Bloc Québécois, and then as vice-chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, but, on the other hand, I was worried, because I did not know what issues I would be able to make progress on. We work within a society that is still far too misogynist, just as is still the case in politics, where I sometimes have the feeling I am in an “old boys' club”, if I may say that.

I was nonetheless proud to have raised problems in other committees, whether it was assaults in the Armed Forces or the issue of assaults in sport, which we first tried to take to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

Recently, on March 8, I gave interviews to some journalists. I talked about my pride. During those interviews, one journalist asked me a surprising question. He wanted to know why we still need a status of women committee in 2024. I was floored. That was when I realized all the work this committee does, all the work done by an exceptional chair, a strong and open-minded woman like Karen Vecchio. That has enabled us to do an incredible number of studies and produce reports that I hope will not be left on the shelf. Given that our committee is often seen as secondary, there is often a tendency to shelve our studies. I hope we will be able to continue our extremely productive work.

Madam Chair, I want to welcome you here and I congratulate you on your appointment. We have a lot on our plate. We must remember that we need to defend our committee, to stress the excellent and important work we do. There is still a lot of misogyny in our society and we have to point out that the work we do is done in partnership, hand in hand with men. You are welcome here, Mr. Serré.

Our battle is not with men, but too many men believe the feminist movement is against them. This gives rise to online misogyny and hate movements that are especially violent against women. We must denounce this violent speech, these online “men's rights” movements.

On the committee, we have to stress the importance of our work and we have to defend it. Our committee is not secondary. It must not be constantly pushed aside to make way for other committees.

I will stop there. I have already spoken for longer than planned.

Once again, congratulations to Ms. Vecchio. Welcome, Madam Chair, and let us now move on to serious matters. Let us vote on this important motion and continue doing the good work of the committee together.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Gazan, you have the floor.

[*English*]

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Just very quickly, I wanted to say to you, Shelby, how much I appreciate you. I know this was a difficult welcome. Thank you for your grace.

I also want to commend all committee members. I care about all of you deeply, and I'm so very proud of us.

Thank you for letting us discuss this motion. It was important. I wanted to thank everybody and let you know I appreciate everybody on the committee so very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Andréanne.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** I would like to make one little technical comment. At the start of the meeting, the sound was not loud enough. It is a bit better now.

We are told not to turn the volume up to maximum and that is what I do, but it does not always work, and we miss words. The volume is not loud enough, Madam Chair.

• (29930)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We'll suspend until we resolve the problem.

• (29930)

(Pause)

• (29930)

**The Chair:** We are back.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Madam Chair, can I call for a vote? I'm bad with procedure. I should have done that before.

**The Chair:** Certainly.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to go to a vote? We can just adopt the motion at ease, if that works for everyone.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** In order to respect Karen's ambitious and expedient way of getting through studies and reports, let's keep moving.

With that, we'll go in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]









Published under the authority of the Speaker of  
the House of Commons

---

### SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

---

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

---

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité  
du Président de la Chambre des communes

---

### PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

---

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

---

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :  
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>