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Truth-Gathering Process
Part 1 Public Hearings
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Thursday April 5, 2018

Public Volume 90
Heiltsuk Women Community Perspective Panel:
Chief Marilyn Slett, Joann Green,
Leona Humchitt & Mavis Windsor

Heard by Chief Commissioner Marion Buller
Commission Counsel: Christa Big Canoe

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MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Good afternoon,

Chief Commissioner Buller, as -- I couldn't have done that introduction without your excellent words and speaking your language, thank you for introducing the panel that is before the Commissioner today.

Before we actually start though, I would request that the registrar promise each of the witnesses in an on Eagle Feather. And I'd be happy to again introduce -- if we could -- if we could please, start Mr. Registrar, right now the lovely lady holding the microphone is Leona Humchitt.

MR. REGISTRAR: Okay.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Feather.

MR. REGISTRAR: Leona.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Right.

MR. REGISTRAR: Leona, do you promise to tell you your truth in a good way this afternoon?

MS. LEONA HUMCHITT: I promise.

MR. REGISTRAR: Thank you.

LEONA HUMCHITT, Affirmed:

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: And beside her is Joann Green.

MR. REGISTRAR: Do you want to pass it down.
Sorry? Jo ...

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Joann Green.
MR. REGISTRAR: Jolene (sic), Jolene --
MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Oh Ann Green.
MR. REGISTRAR: Joann, hi. Joann, do you promise to tell your truth in a good way this afternoon?
MS. JOANN GREEN: I do, yes.

JOANN GREEN, Affirmed:

MR. REGISTRAR: You do, thank you. Okay.
MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: And this is -- the next is Chief Marilyn Slett.
MR. REGISTRAR: Okay. Chief Marlane (sic).
MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Marilyn.
MR. REGISTRAR: Okay. Chief Marilyn, do you promise to tell your truth in a good way this afternoon?
CHIEF MARILYN SLETT: I do.
MR. REGISTRAR: Thank you.

Marilyn Slett, Affirmed:

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: And right beside me is Mavis Windsor.
MR. REGISTRAR: Okay. Good afternoon, Mavis. Do you promise to tell your truth in a good way this afternoon?
MS. MAVIS WINDSOR: I do.

MAVIS WINDSOR, Affirmed:
MR. REGISTRAR: Okay, thank you.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: And I believe that -- the reason the panel is here today and the important things that they want to talk about, the introduction I believe Leona, you're going to provide for us.

MS. LEONA HUMCHITT: I am, thank you.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Thank you.

MS. LEONA HUMCHITT: (Speaking Hailhzaqvla language). Greetings hereditary Chiefs, Matriarchs, our precious Elders, and children, people from this community, and all our relatives. It's a real honour to be here today. And I'm here to discuss how we got here.

We bring warm greetings, love, and blessing from the Heiltsuk people of Bella Bella, B.C. We want to thank the Tsleil-Waututh, Squamish, Musqueam, and Tsawwassen First Nations for allowing us to do this work on your traditional unceded territory.

I want to start by remembering a beautiful beloved Elder who's no longer with us today. As you know Commissioner, our Nation, along with many other First Nations, the language is at risk of being lost. And we have been strategically working toward, you know, an aggressive plan to ensure that we do not lose the cornerstone of who we are. And so the reason I want to remember this beautiful Elder, Granny Margaret Campbell
(phonetic), she was one of our very fluent Heiltsuk speakers and she always addressed our community in Heiltsuk, so to speak Heiltsuk is to Hailhzaqvla. And we were very blessed, you know, that she maintained that fluency and that English was her second language. So to convey something in English was difficult because you can not translate one Heiltsuk word to an English word or vice versa. For example, reconciliation in our language is -- sorry (Speaking in Hailhzaqvla), and in Heiltsuk that means to turn anything around and make it right again. So our dear beloved Elder, you knew in your heart when she expressed in English, her second language, that something touched her heart, something set her soul on fire when she spoke and said, it's a big deal. It's a big deal to be here today.

Last year we made application for standing today and we're very blessed that -- to have that opportunity to be here and it's a big deal for us. We made the journey here from Bella Bella a couple of days ago. Our -- our delegation, we -- we met upon our arrival because we wanted to check-in, and about this special day, and we sat and -- and intended on a -- a short debrief at check-in. But it turned out to be three -- three hours long. And it was a very emotional check-in.

And we talked and we -- the common thread
from each and every one of us as individuals, we did not feel qualified to be here. We didn't feel that our individual pain was worthy and we didn't mean that to minimize who we are. We mean that in terms of those families that have lost their loved ones, that have not had the opportunity for closure.

We're a remote isolated community. We're an island on the northwest coast of B.C. And that, you know, is a blessing in terms of being insulated from the processes that some -- some families are going through right now. We are mariners. We have an inalienable connection to our waters. And sometimes by accident or by act of nature -- act of God, those sacred waters can become our burial grounds for our loved ones. So it is in that way that we can relate, but it's difficult when you don't have closure.

And we're so very blessed to be able to be here today. I want to say it's a big deal to be here. It's a big deal that we're blessed to be here today from all the grassroots work of the frontline people that made it possible for us to be here today. It's a big deal that those families, that have not had closure, have an opportunity to share their story, to feel like they've been heard. It's a big deal, that it's an opportunity to release some of the burden that they carry, knowing that
their story is going to be documented, and it's a big deal -- it's an opportunity to step out of darkness and into light, so we're really blessed for the opportunity to be here.

And when we talked about, you know, not feeling qualified we recognize that -- that behaviour of feeling worthless, or not cared about has been ingrained in us for many -- many years through residential school, the 60s Scoop. It's been a really -- really difficult journey for Indigenous people of Canada.

At the end of our -- our circle (Speaking Hailhzaqvla language) reminded us that we need to Gví’ilas. We need to uphold the law of our ancestors. The teachings that are been passed down since Creation. And her -- her father reminded her that we all matter and it was that -- it was that message that brought us strength to be here to sit before you and to share our story about violence against women and girls from a Heiltsuk perspective. So we all matter and that's why we're here.

Commissioner Marion, I was here for the opening ceremonies, and it was really a blessing to be here and to witness what took place and you know, the key sound bite from your message was about pain. The Elder that said that we're -- we're all different, but we're all the same by being connected to pain. I want to offer us a channel
that pain as women, as life givers, who know all too well
that the -- the pain, the birthing pain, the labour of love
of bringing a new loved one, a precious milestone, and a
beautiful miracle to life. If we channel the pain that we
share -- a birthing pain, to birth something new, to be
waiting in great expectation for something good to come
from standing together, working together, collaborating.

As an elected leader I've learned that it's
important for me -- I -- I never would have known that
becoming a grandmother is a whole new level of love. And
it's really important for us to personalize the work that
we're doing today to make it meaningful. So for me it's
important to put a new memory in the minds of my
grandchildren; Maggie (phonetic), and Cassie (phonetic),
Charlie (phonetic), and Addie (phonetic).

I heard that beautiful inspirational quote
that it came from an (Speaking Hailhzaqvla) Elder during
their land claims, and it really inspired me and I
encourage all of us to remember that quote, to put a new
memory in the minds of our children. It's a real beautiful
thing.

We are all here because of the pain that we
share, the history of the violence against Indigenous women
and girls has made each and every one of us feel less
deserving and at times like no one cares about us. But
this is wrong, because we all matter.

Heiltsuk women and girls have been the victim of violence against them in numerous forms. There are women and girls who had suffered directly violence including being murdered, sexually assaulted, and physically beaten. Heiltsuk women and girls have always been the subject of spiritual and psychological violence through physical violence and institutional structures.

The Canadian legal and politic system has systemically excluded and directly denigrated Indigenous women and men. While we have historical examples such as legislation and policies designed to erase the identity of Indigenous identity through residential schools, the 60 Scoop, and land and reserve legislation. We still have those current legislation government policies, judicial enforcement, that are designed to do the same thing.

In today's legislation the effects of legislation regarding families and children legibility for membership through marriage and birth, governance of Indigenous communities, the justice system, and the allocation of harvesting of food resources continue to break down our family structures, to erase our cultural structures, and denigrate the role of women in our societies.

Even laws and policies which may appear
neutral are not. One would think something like the Federal Fisheries Act, or the Provincial Environmental Management Act are neutral towards women, but this is not the case. These Acts exclude Indigenous interests, which breaks down our family structures, our role as women within our culture, and attempt to control our erase our identities. Violence occurs where we can feel it, see it, and hear it, but also invisibly through Canadian written laws.

This Commission has been plagued with public criticism and still faces significant challenges and that to conduct regional hearings will require an extension of time and budget allocation for a minimum of another two years. I want to way that we were really blessed to Indigenous people on this panel and I value and appreciate the work that you and your colleagues are doing. I know it hasn't been easy, but you keep on, and I know why, Gayaxsixa.

We are cautious about the possibility of any positive outcome through this process, but we have no choice but to speak about the wrongs of violence that have been visited upon our Indigenous women and girls, and let it be known that we will fight back. What has happened to women and girls and our families is not morally or legally acceptable. We hope that our participation, and all the
people who are participating in this Commission will prove
to create a positive outcome for all Indigenous people, but
particularly -- in particular women and girls.

We have developed a Heiltsuk women's declaration. The Heiltsuk women from Bella Bella passed a resolution to adopt the Heiltsuk women's declaration in May of 2016, which was later supported by Heiltsuk Tribal Council by a resolution in February 2018. I will read it at this time, the Heiltsuk women's declaration, "We are

Heiltsuk women. We are strong as cedar
trees. We are the mothers who give
birth to Nations. We are the mother's
who bring future generations into
being. We are the lifeblood of our
people. We are the daughters, the
grandmothers, and granddaughters, the
aunties and nieces, the sisters of our
Nation. We make our Nation rich. We
come from the matriarchy and our
womanhood is a blessing. We are the
heart of Heiltsuk ceremonies. We are
the heart of Heiltsuk families. We
have the right to health and wellness,
and the responsibility to ensure the
health and wellness of our children,
and of our families. This is a principle of reciprocity. We have the right to safety. We deserve lives that are free of emotional, verbal, physical, and sexual abuse. This is the principle of respect. We have the right to bless and care for our loved ones and to be blessed and cared for in turn. This is a principle of love. We have the right to relationships that are balanced and respectful, where we have freedom of individuals. This is the principle of equality. We have the right to a community that is vocal, aware, and supportive, with the resources in place to support us and uplift us. This the principle of justice. We have the right to freedom from fear and shame, to healing, and to happiness. This is the principle of joy. We are here through the strength of our family ties. We are here through the guidance of our Heiltsuk Hailhzaqvla, the teachings that have sustained our people since the time of
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Perspective Panel

Creation. We are here with the hands of our ancestors on our shoulders. We are here with future generations before us. We are sacred in mind, body, and spirit. We are women of integrity who have strengthened by our Heiltsuk culture. We honour ourselves. We honour one another. This is consistent with the principles of our culture, and the foundation of our work as Heiltsuk women and as matriarchs. These are the guiding principles that we exercise in everything that we do to remind us that we are worthy. That we are powerful. That we are resilient. That we are strong. And that we all matter. The Heiltsuk Nation have been engaged in reconciliation of its rights and title with the Province and the Federal government. This work is critical to the wellbeing of women and girls, as well as every person in our Nation. Because self-government means a real opportunity to restore our cultural identity and re-establish the true
At this time we'll see the video. That we're going to present.

(VIDEO PRESENTATION)

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Just have a quick technical issue. We'll start it again in a moment from the same spot. Our apologies.

(VIDEO PRESENTATION CONTINUES)

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: So I believe Chief Marilyn, you're now also be addressing a number of issues.

CHIEF MARILYN SLETT: Thank you. Good afternoon everybody. I would like to thank everybody for being here today, and all of my Heiltsuk sisters that are here with me, and the Commissioners and the Elder, thank you.

So Leona and Ayla gave a really good overview of -- of Heiltsuk, and the context for who we are. And I want to share a statement of sovereignty that we rely upon as -- as a Heiltsuk Nation, and this is something that also guides our work. And this is a -- a statement that was made 105 years ago by Bob Anderson, and I'll just read it out for you. It's a -- a short statement. "We feel we own the whole of this country, every bit of it, and we ought to have something to say about it. We own it all. We
will never change our mind in that respect and after we are dead our children will hold the same ideas. It does not matter how long the government takes to determine this question. We will remain the same in our ideas about this matter."

And this was made by a young Heiltsuk Chief. He was with in his early 20s at the McKenna-McBride Commission in August of 1913. And this statement is something that we share with -- with government, and it's -- it's a statement of sovereignty. It's a statement of our strength, and it's also a statement of the vision and the ownership that we hold over our traditional territory.

I also wanted to share, for some context to -- to Heiltsuk, more recently we -- with the guidance of our -- our community and the guidance of our Heiltsuk traditional Chiefs, our Hemas, we -- we declared a Heiltsuk declaration over our title and rights and this was in October 2015. And this builds upon the statements from -- from Bob Anderson.

We are the Heiltsuk people, descendants of ancestors who exercise sovereign authority and ownership over our land and waters for thousands of years. Today we reaffirm the continued existence of Heiltsuk title and our
rights as a Nation to exercise jurisdiction and management
authority to derive economic benefits from the lands,
waters, and resources within our territory. The source of
Heiltsuk title flows from our historic ownership,
occupation, stewardship, use, and control of our territory.

Our title predates and survives the assertion
of European sovereignty. Each generation is taught the
history of our lineage and how it connected our people to
the ownership and responsibilities related to our
territory. Heiltsuk territory includes the (Speaking
Hailhzaqvla) encompassing 35,553 square kilometres on the
central coast of B.C.

We have never surrendered our title to our
homeland, ecosystems and resources, as they are essential
to our way of life.

For more than 14,000 years the Heiltsuk's
relationship and understanding of the land and waters has
been passed down from generation to generation. It has
formed a rich and cultural, social and economic fabric in
our community. And it builds upon our spiritual
relationship with our territory. This relationship extends
from the past and shaped both present and future of our
Nation.

We have developed our own systems of
knowledge and understanding of our territory, which is
representative of a living symbolic relationship with the lands and waters. We're connected to -- to the land and sea, our culture is intertwined with -- with our living environment. Our history is passed down from generation to generation and we rely upon the -- the land and sea for our way of life.

We live in a -- on an island up on the central coast of British Columbia, and the -- the way of life we have, has sustained us for time immemorial, most recently some archeological evidence pre-dates us back before the -- the ice age. So we have a long history of survival within Heiltsuk territory. And we wanted to -- to share some of that context as we share some of our presentation here today. Thank you.

**MS. JOANN GREEN:** Good afternoon. My Heiltsuk name is (Speaking Hailhzaqvla language), my borrowed name is Joann Green. I want to thank all of the witnesses here today. We thank the Commissioners for listening to what we have to share because we think it's so important and we matter.

I'm going to be talking about our self-government. Prior to colonization our Heiltsuk people were always followed their -- Gvi'ılas, the laws of our land. Our Nation worked together with our Chiefs and our Elders that held our community together.
Self-government and reconciliation. Heiltsuk are currently in exploratory discussions with the Government of Canada and British Columbia on reconciliation of our rights and title. Prominent in these discussions is establishing our self-government. With the Federal government we have spent many months exchanging ideas, proposals, and working collaboratively to give shape to what reconciliation may look like between Canada and our Heiltsuk Nation.

To us this means recognizing our Heiltsuk title, our rights and self-government. We have identified five priority areas; self-government, housing, economic development, language preservation, and revitalization in fish and marine resources.

As a Hemas in our community I struggle with the idea that our language -- our Heiltsuk language is so close to extinction. In August of this year I conducted a research project and was so disheartened because I realized that our fluent speakers were only at one percent of our entire population and that real broke my heart.

We refer to priority areas as priority house posts. They are fundamental pillars required to build reconciliation. (Speaking Hailhzaqvla language), a traditional potlatch, term meaning -- term meaning to turn something around and make it right again. That is so
important to us as a people.

Establishing self-government means that the role of women and girls can take their proper place within our modern traditions and not be subject to the resumptions of colonization.

I will now speak to the government -- government structure. Heiltsuk leadership is a collaborative exercise of traditional leadership lead by the Hemas and political leadership led by Heiltsuk Tribal Council. Together our Heiltsuk leadership governs the -- the Nation and the cultural wellbeing of its people. Women are known to be the backbone of the community and play a large role in Heiltsuk leadership. The majority of our council members are women and the Chief counsellor, is Chief Marilyn Slett. The omucks (phonetic) are a society of women of high standing in the community who give advice to our Humas, our Chiefs. Their advice centers on maintaining the unity and wellbeing of the community including advice on justice, family, and cultural practices. Gayaxsixa.

**MS. MAVIS WINDSOR:** (Speaking Hailhzaqvla language). My given name is (Speaking Hailhzaqvla language), my English name is Mavis Windsor. I'm the social development director in my community, and I've been working in my community since 1996.
I'm going to make reference to how -- or make reference to the historical colonialism and impacts on our people and not -- not only the Heiltsuk people, but many -- many Indigenous Nations across Canada. The Constitutional Act of 1967, and in particular Section 9124, the Indian Act of 1986, and the National Projects of Assimilation. Residential schools and cultural genocide, whose main purpose was to take the Indian out of the child. And this is made reference to in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to Canada's cultural genocide and is darkest history. Thank you, Marilyn.

Cultural prohibitions. Our people were prohibited from practicing their culture and our languages, they were prohibited from speaking, and as a result our language as -- as Joann made reference to, is near extinction.

Discrimination with Band membership. I remember growing up with our women being discriminated against when they married a non-Indigenous man. And I remember feeling so hurt for my aunt, and for many other women who suffered the same discrimination.

In the 60ies -- in the 1960s large numbers of Indigenous child were taken from their homes and placed in foster care, and today it's referred to as the 60s Scoop.

Indigenous child are overrepresented in -- in
the foster care system, and as a social worker I know that children from our own Nation -- or Heiltsuk Nation, have the highest percentage of children in care.

There has been over incarceration of Indigenous peoples in -- in Canada -- in the jails in Canada, and tuberculosis was also a disease that was transported to communities through the (Speaking Hailhzaqvla language) and I remember my -- my Elders talking about the canoes that were sent from Victoria to Bella Bella, to our -- our Heiltsuk territories, and how we lost so many of our people. So many that they amalgamated into one community, and I believe that what they said to me was that the population was decimated to just over a hundred people, from about 20,000 is what they estimate, that's how many of our people were lost.

The lasting impacts of colonialism, on not only the Heiltsuk, but on all Indigenous people across Canada and North America are; racism, inequality, suicide, dependency, Indigenous women are marginalized, and traditional roles are replaced by imposed patriarchal systems. Traditional governments have been replaced by an imposed electoral governing system. We've lost much of our identity. We've lost much of our language, as Joann made reference to. We only have one percent of our population that speaks our language. Our women -- women across Canada
are made to feel worthless in our society. The violence
against women is not addressed in an expedient manner and
more often than not women's lives continue to be in danger.

Many of our people, including our women and
our children live in poverty. Suffer from social
inequality, and breakdown of families, addiction, premature
mortality rates, and low levels of literacy and education,
and high levels of mental illness and physical diseases.

We are the legacy, despite the trauma, our
communities continue to live through we are capable of
addressing the violence again women in our communities; the
solution is within us -- within our communities.

However, we do have barriers. The barriers
to developing resources that are impediments as we try to
address these issues. We look at them as modern challenges
to our cultures that are thousands and thousands of years
old.

Our Nation, our Heiltsuk Nation is considered
to be one of the foremost, progressive communities, but we
face many challenges. We face many gaps in our services.
And over the years our membership have identified the
following health and mental wellness. Our people now
suffer from illnesses that are not known to our members in
years past. I remember as a child there was no -- I never
ever heard that someone was suffering from heart disease,
from diabetes, from gallstones, and kidney stones. From having multiple sclerosis and fibromyalgia, cancer, and severe allergies, and asthma, these are all diseases that exist in our community today.

And for -- for me, as a social worker, who has worked with families over the years one of the challenges that I -- I've noticed in our community is technology. Technology contributes to family breakdown. It contributes to miscommunication, it contributes to lost relationships. Children are spending far too much time with technology and not spending time with their loved ones. To me it's a -- it's a real strong barrier and a challenge.

Other issues are child and mental health wellness, and men's wellness. We have been -- as I said, we're challenged with lack of resources. We have very few women support services. We don't have as much Elders programs as we would like. For instance, we don't have enough services for Elders; homemaking services, home improvement services, workshops.

Our challenges in education, as Joann made reference to, is our loss of language. Culture and arts program, music programs, leadership and life planning, and in the social service area our lack of resources are seen in the need for life skills and essential skills training.
and for on-the-job training programs for our community members, and connecting to our land and our seas, our resources has -- has been an area where our -- especially our community, professionals, resource professionals have noted that there a real need to promote harvesting and preparation of our traditional foods, to share our food, to prepare food together, and to have large family gatherings, and meals together, preserving our foods, harvesting our medicines, and preparing them for use, and community garden expansion.

I'll now pass it on to Marilyn, and she's going to talk about resource development and violence against women.

CHIEF MARILYN SLETT: Thank you, Mavis. We had one last area that we wanted to share that provides a context to -- to our presentation here today and I just wanted to share with you, I was looking at my note book as we were making our presentation here, and I have note book that I started when I was up in Haida Gwaii, and I was there with many of the -- the women that are here with me today, and I entitled it, Strong Resilient Heiltsuk. And just gives me strength, and one of the things that we talked about as women, when we were up in Haida Gwaii, is that we're using our collective voices to give a platform for action. And we're using our collective voices as
Indigenous women to strengthen one another across -- across the sea that connects us. And resource development is something that affects us as -- as a Heiltsuk community, but any of the communities on the coast of British Columbia.

And I wanted to share a bit about an experience that we had in -- in our community. In October, a couple of years ago -- October, we had a -- an incident with -- a barge and tug, that's also called the Nathan E. Stewart.

Living on unsurrendered land our people have is felt immense pressures from extractive industries which weigh heavy on our way of life and sense of balance with our homelands. Heiltsuk territory is rich with resources that have sustained our way of life of thousands of years. We have stewarded our lands through principles. If your family had a right to fish a river system you also have the responsibility to maintain it for future generations.

Because of our relationship to the lands and waters, our communities also face threats brought on by climate change. The Federal and Provincial governments approach to the extraction and allocation of resources undermine the ability of Indigenous communities to maintain their culture for Heiltsuk, the loss of land, or the limitation and destruction of resources degrades cultural
values, family structure, and traditional practices.

On October 13, 2016, we had an oil spill in a major harvesting area of our territory. It has been incredibly stressful on our community. The full breath of the impact is largely unknown. We are reaching a one-and-a-half year anniversary of the oil spill, post spill we have been very busy on every front with regards to health impacts, environmental impacts, economic impacts, and cultural losses. Members of our community also experience post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of the spill.

We have completed our own investigation report because the Federal government would not discuss their investigation with us. We have completed an adjudication process made up of traditional leaders and matriarchs. And their review -- their -- their process was to review our investigation report through the lens of our traditional laws and also record what traditional laws would have been violated as a result of the Nathan E. Stewart incident, so that report just being completed, or completed now. It hasn't been made public yet, they're just completing it. But we will be making that available to -- to the public in the future.

Our community's recovery efforts are undermined by government and polluters refusing to take responsibility for the spill, and to cooperate in its
aftermath. We have had no choice but -- but to prepare for litigation for the losses that we've encountered and for the reimbursement of our expenses in responding to the oil spill. The stress caused by this event has been severe in that members have not been able to harvest in that area causing a loss of dissemination of knowledge, a loss of food, and the loss of use of that part of the territory.

And I wanted to share with you the women -- some of the women that were out there as first responders at the -- at the Nathan E. Stewart. Tracey Robinson (phonetic) is a member of the Heiltsuk Nation and was one of the first people on the scene of the spill. The organization that oversees oil spills was a full day's trip away. And the planes that were delivering supplies and support were delayed due to bad weather. In this absence Heiltsuk Nation took control and stepped in.

Tracey was on the water for 21 days straight after the spill. And this is a quote that is attributed to Tracey, "My partner and I were out there just before 10:00, just after the tug sank. There were Heiltsuk boats pushing on the barge to keep it off the rocks. We started grabbing boom and waited for other Heiltsuk members to come out with the absorbent noodle boom just trying
Tracey is a lifelong harvester, and her mother was a commercial clam digger for 20 years. "When I was younger my mom and I did a restorative justice program where we lived out in Gale Creek for a month. Revealed Robinson, her voice breaking, we had brought food, but we tried to eat as much as we could off the land. We ate mussels off the rocks, picked seaweed and sea asparagus off the beach. My mom pulled cedar bark, and we would weave baskets in roses -- in cedar roses trying to learn how to live off the land. It was rejuvenating and brought back the culture in me. Now I feel so lost and I feel so sorry for my kids. They're never going to experience the full riches and the full amazingness of Gale Creek."

Megan (phonetic) Humchitt is also a member of the Heiltsuk Nation, and a lifelong harvester. Her father, Harvey (phonetic) Humchitt, is a traditional hereditary
chief. Megan was one -- was on the scene in the morning of
the incident before the tug sank. "On the morning of
October 13th my husband, father, and I
heard that a tanker had run aground.
We left for the incident site about
7:45, 8:00 a.m. It was such a serious
incident, so there was no question
about going. I felt compelled to be
out there to witness what was happening
and to see if we could help at all. We
were one of the first boats at the
incident site. No one came over to see
us when we got there. We basically
just sat there and watched as the tug
and barge rolled into the swells. We
can hear the tug grinding onto the
rocks, at that time it was mid-tide and
going up. When the tug sank there were
tons of diesel everywhere. The tug
took seconds to sink. There was a
discolouration of the water. It was
milky. It looks like a herringbone."

And this quote is also attributed to -- to
Megan Humchitt, "It was really hard. Very heartbreaking to
watch. I have a connection to the area
as a Heiltsuk person. I have not spent a lot of time, but -- I have not spent a lot of time there as a kid, but I have spent a lot of time in Seaforth Channel around Ivory Island. We harvest food from the affected area such as (Speaking Hailhzaqvla language),
salmon, halibut, clams. We also buy food that people harvest there was well, such as cod and lincod. My dad harvested there for commercial purposes from the affected area. This has affected our family and community quite profoundly. The fear for the future of that area is immense. Increased tanker traffic is very concerning. When our environment is sick we are sick. I feel like this has had -- this has made our community sick. It effects Heiltsuk traditional life, as Heiltsuk people are so tied to places are so tied to places, and if those places are devastated then it will have an effect on our traditional way of life in a
huge way. It has an effect on the
people who harvest and on the stories."

We felt that that was really important to
share with you, and it does tie in to what we're talking
about here today with supporting women in our communities,
and the impacts a resource development in our territories.

And we wanted to share with you some
recommendations that came out of our report from Amnesty
International called, Out of sight, Out of Mind. Amnesty
International has recognized the negative impact of
resource extraction and development on women's health and
safety. Their most recent report discusses how resource
extraction and development can degrade the role of women in
their societies, and introduce economic and social
instability.

Amnesty International makes recommendations
to counter those impacts. And I'll just briefly summarize
what those recommendations are. Apply the standard of
free, prior, and informed consent to all decision-making
processes related to resource development where the rights
of Indigenous peoples may be affected.

Increase the social service funding in
British Columbia.

Review and approvals of resource development
projects be informed by a gender based analysis conducted
in consultation with women's rights and Indigenous organizations.

Work with Indigenous peoples to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action, including the application of the United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples.

And finally, to ensure that the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry leads to the adoption of a comprehensive plan on violence against women and girls, including specific measures to decrease resource related risks.

We wanted to share with you our -- our concerns around the -- the impact to our land and sea. We heard from some of our -- our panelists here today -- we're -- we're seafaring people. We live on the sea. On an island on the coast, so the -- having a healthy ecosystem is very important to -- to the Heiltsuk. It will ensure that our survival is for another 14,000 years going forward.

So I wanted to thank you for listening to the contextual background of Heiltsuk, and who we are as Heiltsuk people and Heiltsuk women, and I believe we have a -- we have questions, okay.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Thank you very much. Actually, Chief, if I might ask you a question first, I
think it seemed obvious as you shared this story about the spill and how it impacted the community, the women, and all of the resources that there's a tie between the health of our environment and the health of women, but I was wondering if you could maybe speak to you know, the concept of resource extraction, or when there's an exploitation where there's not stewardship, how that -- do you feel that that -- that is representative of the way the environment treated when it's exploited like that, or not taken care of with steward, that also representative of the issues we're seeing with missing and murdered Indigenous women and the violence they experience?

CHIEF MARILYN SLETT: It is. One of the issues raised in the Amnesty International report was the influx of people that come in when -- when there are big resource development projects happening in or around their communities, and you know, it comes with transient workers that come in, and that does make it unsafe for -- for women that live in that area and we see, you know, here on -- on the north coast of B.C., and -- and other areas where industry is very prevalent and -- and active, so it's directly linked, thank you.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Chief Commissioner, at this time we would like to ask to have our 15-minute break because the panel will continue following the break,
and we'll be moving towards contextualizing. Now that we 
have sort of the context of the community, the context of 
the colonial legacy -- I believe that the panel will be 
addressing a lot of that, so modern initiatives, not just 
the impacts, but initiatives the community is taking from a 
place of leadership, from women leadership in community, 
and also be providing recommendations, but at this point I 
kindly ask for a 15-minute break.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: Sure, 
let's take a 15-minute break. Thank you.

(SHORT PAUSE)

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Chief Commissioner, 
if we could actually commence with the panel again. With 
the -- the starting point before we actually transition 
into the women leadership, and how they're taking 
initiatives, I'm just going to ask the panel a couple of 
clarification questions and if we could get a little more 
information. The amount of information that every one 
shared with amazing and the context was so important so 
thank you for sharing that.

One of the things that was discussed in your 
presentation was sort of the impacts of laws and policies 
and the discussion of the Indian Act. I know that the 
implementation of the reserve system, or who can be 
registered as an Indian pursuant to the law has had an
impact on a number of women across the country, and I just
wanted to ask what that imposition of the reserve system,
or how women have status in law, has impacted your Nation?

CHIEF MARILYN SLETT: Thank you. Part of what
we had mentioned in the earlier part of the presentation is
the size of our Heiltsuk traditional territory. We're made
up of five tribal groups that amalgamated, that make up the
Heiltsuk Nation, and our traditional territory is 35,553
square kilometres, so it's -- it's vast, and it's land and
sea.

We've spent a lot of time and -- and
financial resources on developing land use plans marine use
plans, stewardship plans, how we're going to steward our
territory, training people. We have coastal guardian
watchmen that are out on the water every day being the eyes
and ears of -- of the sea.

And as a part of the collective on -- on the
coast we work with seven other communities up and down from
central coast, north coast, up to Haida Gwaii. And between
all of us we all have stewardship departments in -- in our
territories, and we have a guardian watchmen network where
our guardian watchmen get together and -- and speak on an
annual basis and share information on -- on what they can
do to support each other.

So we have a lot of investment in our
communities, you know, to -- to protect our -- our way of life, and -- but it's not reflective with the -- with the Indian Act and the reserve system that the Indian Act imposed on -- on the Heiltsuk Nation and placed us in these little pockets of little reserves.

And one of the things that our Elders say you know, and our people and our -- our women that we're connected to the land and sea, we're one. And with that I -- I always hear this in my -- in my head, with my late Uncle Cyril (phonetic), he would say, When the tide goes out the table is set. And -- and that's reflective of you know, our connection, and our bread basket, which is -- which is the sea.

So the Indian Act has really oppressed our -- our Nation in terms of these reserves systems imposed on us had you know, effected our -- our governance structures that we had in place, had affected our -- our own economies -- our economies, we were thriving communities. We were self-sustaining communities with governance systems in place. So certainly the -- the oppression of this -- this Indian Act has -- has affected us with women in terms of identity, and the Indian Act providing you know, their rules, Canada's rules, on who is a Heiltsuk person.

As Heiltsuk people we know who Heiltsuk are. You know, we can self-identify, and identify our own
people. And this Indian Act status registration system is not something that is reflective of Heiltsuk identity. It's very much been imposed on us.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** If I might follow up on one question because you had explained that you're a matriarchal community, we know that you have hereditary chiefs, and elected chiefs, chief counsellors that are women, because women leadership important within your traditions. The Indian Act, how has that impacted historically, or even currently, the ability for women leadership, and women guidance to correct a lot of the issues that have been created by the laws and policies?

**CHIEF MARILYN SLETT:** Well, certainly women in our community have been marginalized with the Indian Act and -- and the policies of the Indian Act. You know, with the Indian agents, you know, coming into our community aided by you know, the Government of Canada and the -- the various churches took that power, you know, away from our hereditary system and replaced it with an elected system that was answerable to -- to the government, not to our people. And you know, that has been you know, something that you know, has had devastating you know, effects on our community in terms of self-relicense and you know, our inherent governance and -- and holding up our -- our own governance structures. And it's really -- placed you know,
in its place a lot of dependency and -- and that's something that we weren't, you know, we weren't a dependent Nation. You know, we were very self-sustaining with economies.

The Heiltsuk Nation has Supreme Court affirmed right, it's call the Gladstone decision, and that is based on our collective history of you know, having that strong economy and -- and selling you know, our -- you know, making a life -- making a livelihood, you know, in -- in our Nations. So you know, for us you know, that's -- you know been -- we hold that up.

You know, right now as we speak it's herring season in our community, people are out there harvesting today as we're sitting here, and they're harvesting -- their spawn on kelp.

And you know, one of things to -- to get a better context to that, we -- we practice what we call a non-kill fishery, so our -- our people will harvest kelp, and they'll put it onto lines, and then they'll place it into certain areas, and the herring will come and spawn on it, and that's where we harvest, the spawn off -- off the herring.

The commercial harvest is quite different. They'll fish for the whole herring and only take the -- the eggs you know, from -- from the -- that's why it's called a
kill fishery. So you know, our fishery is very sustainable, and it's sustained our people for thousands and thousands and thousands of years.

And in our -- in our traditional territory we have stone fish trapped that are still in place, clam gardens that are you know, still in place, and we have a very rich history of -- you know, our connection to -- to those harvests, and just to bring it back to herring, this is our New Year. We -- you know, it's the start of our -- our harvest New Year.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Thank you. I have a question, and maybe Mavis might be in a good position to answer it.

Mavis, when you were talking -- a couple things, you had mentioned a large number of issues that the Commission has heard from -- from across the country about the colonial legacy of things like residential school, the child apprehension and 60s Scoop, and then you gave us a list of lasting impacts, and they went on and on, and you also talked about the health impacts. Things that your community didn't see, but now do see.

And so I wanted to ask you more specifically you know, in terms of things like the laws and government, things such as residential school or 60s Scoop, what has the impacts been specifically on the Heiltsuk Nation?
MS. MAVIS WINDSOR: The impacts that we've observed over time in our community is that families have been severely impacted. Our parents didn't know how to parent. My mother didn't know how to parent me. And so a lot of what I learned about being a person, about being a woman, came from my landlady, who was a white person. And that's only example.

Relationships, the parent and child relationships, as I just explained to you, is severely impacted. Lack of parenting goes back to my grandmothers, and has carried on, so we're slowly offering programs through -- the Kaxla Child and Family Service Agency offers parenting programs to families in our community, and you know, the -- the impact is far reaching.

It hasn't only affected relationships, it's affected you know, how we see ourselves as Heiltsuk women. You know, it can be said over and over and over again because it's very real for us and it's very real for -- for women who feel that they're worthless. They feel that they're not heard, and that's why something know like this is so important is because this is a vehicle to give voice for women who don't have a voice.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Thank you. That leads to sort of where we want to go down in talking about women leadership and initiatives, but one of the things,
before we sort of go down there, like everyone on this panel is a leader, or is a frontline worker in a community where you're trying to ensure wellness, health, sustainability of your community, and I can't help but when I was listening to you earlier, see all of the things that you've had to address, and by and large those have not been issues that you've brought or raised. They're not problems that you created, it's often been external forces such as law and policy, governments, other people that have brought to your community, the way that way impact you now with your health and wellness, but as women leadership in a community now, you're charged, using those principles you shared us with earlier, with the -- with the Heiltsuk women declaration, you're now charged with kind of fixing or trying to address all those harms that were caused, and to me that seen seems like a large task, and I know you guys are up for it because the way you're talking about these issues you've already identified them. You've already laid out the principles you want -- that you want to ensure are put into place as you move forward in heal.

But to me it seems really apparent that a lot of what's happened wasn't your doing, but now you're the one that will be having to address it. That seems like a pretty big task, and so my -- my question to you is how do you start doing that as the leadership -- the women
leadership in the community? How do you start making those initiatives? What does it take -- what -- what are the things that you have to consider on how to address these impacts and these problems that weren't caused by you?

**CHIEF MARILYN SLETT:** As women in -- in our community, and we're not unique on this. I -- I think that you know, I -- I've certainly witnessed it in other communities, but women can mobilize, you know, they're the backbones of our communities. The strength and -- and give the life you know, to our communities so you know, for us we have a long history of sisterhood in our community and supporting women in our community.

And we were talking about it over the last couple of days, going back to organized support with one another, going back to the Native Brotherhood days. And we had a Bella Bella chapter of the Native Sisterhood in Bella Bella that provided all of the fundraising and organisation for our men to partake with the Native Brotherhood. And you know, at one point the women in our community, there were two, Brenda Campbell (phonetic), and Kitty Carpenter (phonetic) that said, "You know, we also want to vote. We don't want just fundraise and organize for -- for you to go down. But you know, all of these issues, you know, are -- are our issues too."

And they brought it into the -- the
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1 convention and said, "Yeah, we'll -- we'll think about it."
2 And Brenda and Kitty got up and said, "Well, if we don't
3 get to vote we're not going to continue to fundraise and
4 organize for you to partake in this anymore." And they got
5 that vote.

6 And, you know, so you know going back to --
7 to that and -- and the Native Brotherhood, as we know, in
8 B.C. is you know foundational for a lot of the -- for the
9 -- Native movement, you know, that happens you know, across
10 our country and -- and British Columbia, you know.

11 And then after that we've had other social
12 networks that my grandmother, Florence (phonetic), used to
13 be a part of and -- and I know I was talking to our Aunt
14 Peggy (phonetic) about it, and they had a group called the
15 -- the Helping Hands (phonetic), and they used to fundraise
16 in the community to help families because they saw that you
17 know, that there were shortfalls you know, with -- with
18 families that you know, couldn't maybe get out for medical
19 or -- or you know, just were having a hard time. So you
20 know, we have a network of women that used to you know,
21 fundraise and -- and get together and help.

22 And going back probably to early -- that was
23 you know, the 70s and 80s and then going to about the year
24 2000 and onwards we had a Heiltsuk women's council, and
25 these were made up of primarily women that were working
within our communities, and we are very honoured and I know that we're very privileged sometimes to be able to go out and take training and go to places and -- and you know, partake in -- in workshops and -- and that sort of thing. And we knew that you know, our women in our community not all of them had that opportunity to go out. So we got together and -- and started fundraising to bring professional development workshops within the community, and we would have annual conferences to -- to provide that to -- to women in our community. And most recently, and -- and it will be presented later on, is another group that came together and developed that women's declaration that was read by -- by Leona.

So we have a -- a long history of -- of collaboration and strength in our community, and you know, it's -- it's been there to address the inequalities that our community is you know, has you know that oppression, and that inequality of not being able to sometimes provide you know, and that comes down to sometimes you know, the access to resources. The policies that you know, the Federal and Provincial governments had placed you know, upon our communities for you know, making a living. You know, that's -- that's really affected us dramatically.

You know, we have issues of what you know, leaders you know, have, you know, brought forward in terms
of you know, we -- we didn't also live this way. We -- we had you know a thriving economy and you know, that's something that, you know, we uphold and -- and know that we can achieve that in a sustainable way going forward. You know, and that's -- that's the vision of our community, and it's also a vision of women in our community around that sustainable economic vision that we are have that we can be a thriving community. We're thriving spiritually within our hearts, we're strong and resilient people. You know, but certainly those outside forces you know, still had its grip you know, and those are the things that we do need to address.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Thank you. I understand that you would like to talk about some of the women leadership initiatives in the community. I'm not sure who would you like to start with, but ...

MS. LEONA HUMCHITT: I just wanted to touch on and provide context into the Heiltsuk women's declaration. It was spawned out of the leadership of my -- my dear cousin, Louisa Jones (phonetic), she rallied our people to -- to provide input into what the Heiltsuk women's declaration can look like, and they had meetings that were seeds of inspiration, and that beautiful piece, I'm happy to acknowledge my Heiltsuk tribal council colleague, Jess Houstee (phonetic), penned that -- that
piece, and it's so beautiful, and it's something that we're really proud of. It is guiding principles for us as women. It's guidance principles for us on a go forward basis. We want to be strategic, we want to -- as I mentioned, put a new memory in the minds of our -- our little ones, and to do that you know we needed to demonstrate that we have a foundation. That we have guiding principles going forward.

The Heiltsuk people have a -- a peace Treaty with the Haida, and it's something that's been nurtured over the last few years. We continue to exchange trips to Haida, and this last visit -- last month, we had a women's dialogue session, and it was very -- very beautiful, inspirational.

The connections that we made with the Haida women were natural, organic, it was like we knew each other for -- for years and years, and we really want to build on that and to be able to continue to nurture the good work that we intend to do through these guiding principles, and we've invited them to come back to Bella Bella for a women's dialogue, and we invite you, Commissioner Buller and Elder Kathy to come and join us, we'll be happy to send you an invite for the continued good work that we're -- we're trying to build upon.

CHIEF MARILYN SLETT: Thank you, Leona. One of the other things that we've participated in is the
British Columbia Assembly of First Nations has hosted some dialogue sessions over the last couple of years, and the -- coming out of that has -- as women leadership with -- within B.C. we've developed an Indigenous women's declaration and that was supported by the Chiefs of Assembly on Women's -- International Women's Day, on March 8th of last month.

And you know, that's something that you know, we're very proud of and that we've participated in as Heiltsuk women and -- and leaders, for us you know, in terms of that regional approach and that -- bringing it back to -- to the -- the panel and -- and some of the challenges that we have, the AFN has certainly been a strong voice for pressing for the establishment of the National Inquiry. And you know, we've supported through resolutions that the Inquiry would support families to ensure that all governments and policing servicing are met, and their obligations to protect the fundamental human rights of Indigenous women and girls, these are foundational within the -- within the declaration for Indigenous women as a regional context for that declaration. And women from all over British Columbia came to the sessions and provided their input to the declaration and was supported by -- as I said, the Chiefs of Assembly last month on -- on International Women's Day.
We wanted to -- to take sure that B.C. women also had a voice and you know, had a declaration and a statement you know, of -- of our strengths you know, going forward as women in leadership. There are 203 First Nation communities in British Columbia, and of that 203 I think the last count there were 47 First Nation elected female leaders in British Columbia.

Part of the other foundational pieces, from a regional perspective include the examination -- or we're hoping that the examination will report on the systemic causes. We've talked about some of that here today, behind violence with Indigenous women and girls. And the vulnerability that you know, that violence factors into -- into our lives. And it includes the historical -- the social, the economic, institutional, and cultural factors, and they also contribute to that continual risk that we're talking about. We've -- we've shared you know, from a Heiltsuk perspective, but it's very much from a regional perspective as well.

So we -- we also recommended through a regional body that, much like you're speaking with a Heiltsuk panel here today, but there would also be panels for institutional and expert witnesses to be able to provide some contextual information to help us understand you know, the systemic causes and these impacts that you
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know, a regional level at a -- at a national level.

So we've also provided many resolutions to
support the -- the Inquiry. We'll continue to support the
-- the work of the B.C. Indigenous women's declaration.
It's new to -- to British Columbia, but it's also something
that woman felt was very important in a leadership -- in a
leadership role, being a woman, and it is -- it is hard.

You know, it's -- it's you know, we face some
challenges, and by supporting one another we can get
through them and you know, this declaration, we also know
that there's commonalties you know, in -- you know, across
our communities. And you know, some of those threats that
we talked about here today also you know, reach into other
communities, so you know, that is important that we -- from
a regional perspective, work together to -- to try to
address them in a way that we can you know, with that
collective leadership.

And I know Commissioner, that you've provided
reports to -- to the Chief's Assemblies, and I just wanted
to thank you for coming out and -- and providing those
reports because it's very important to -- to hear it
directly from -- from yourself and -- and the Commissioners
that assist you. And we know that there's been challenges,
you know, along the way, but we also have largely, in B.C.
supported -- fully supported the -- the Inquiry, so that's
something I just wanted to share with you.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: May I ask a question.

Did you have anything to add to that point? Did you want to add to that point? Okay.

We -- we -- you're talking about the women dialogue sessions and that -- and that the declaration by B.C. Indigenous women and if you're okay I'd just like to ask a little bit more about this so that anyone watching that's not from B.C., or other Indigenous women organizations can maybe get a context of what the dialogue sessions look like, or how they're being helpful. So the dialogue sessions are part of this -- they're a part an point for the leadership to get together and actually talk about specific issues. Can you tell us just a little bit about the dialogue sessions and a touch more about the declaration? Like who was involved in making the declaration by B.C. Indigenous women. And we know it's new, but you know the hope for it maybe it's a good model to look in -- in other jurisdictions.

CHIEF MARILYN SLETT: Definitely. So one of the things -- I'm also a member of the B.C. Assembly of First Nations. I'm one of the board of directors, and also the women's representative from B.C. for the National Women's Council and you know, I've you know, attended different forums throughout the years, and one of the
things that always comes forward from women in leadership
is we need some space for women -- women that are in
leadership roles to come together and talk.

You know, because we -- we were doing it, you
know -- you know, in -- in caucus rooms, you know, having
these conversations during lunch, you know, during some
regional sessions or you know, over breaks, in very
informal, but organic ways. But we -- we knew that we had
to create that space, so the -- the BCAFN sought resources
to be able to bring women together. So we got together in
a couple of different locations here in -- in the lower
mainland, and the sessions were a couple days in length and
they were -- the participation from women were from the
front -- frontline, Band administrators, executive
directors, female Chiefs, female elected Chiefs, hereditary
leaders, and so it was women that are participating in
leadership in their communities.

And we -- we talked about the -- the -- the
strength of our communities, but also you know, the -- the
challenges of our communities and how we can support each
other, so the -- the declaration speaks you know, from --
from that regional level, and it was written by the B.C.
women that participated. It was shared widely with -- with
the Chiefs in Assembly over the past couple of years,
before it was passed by resolution, and it was really
important for us to be able to do that, and we felt it was really important that there was a declaration that talked about the challenges that we have, but also the strength that we have to be able to address that in a collective way. And you know, we do face barriers in our daily lives, and we wanted to also come from a place of strength as a collective voice for women.

And you know, we shared our Heiltsuk woman's declaration at this dialogue session and it supported the B.C. Indigenous women's declaration. One of the other declarations that were shared -- that was shared was from the Nuu-chah-nulth people.

And Deb Foxcroft was there, and -- and she provided that declaration that was created in -- I believe the 1980s and you know, it -- it talks about how we want to be -- it's about reclaiming our roles. The reclamation of our roles in our communities. And the reclamation of our voice in our communities, and we -- we had talked about you know, some of the pressing factors that you know, our community has gone through including you know, culture being oppressed and -- and went underground.

And my father tells me about a story that -- it's a very short story. That he shared with me growing up. He was at -- he would be at this grandmother's house, sitting on -- on the stairs and watching his grandmother
have tea -- afternoon tea with ladies, and he said that they'd be drinking tea out of these little -- big mugs and bowls sometimes, you know, having tea. But he said that they would sing, and they would sit in a circle and they would converse with each other and they would use sticks to you know, to replicate the drum and they would sing in a circle, and -- and he said they were the ones that kept our culture alive.

You know, they -- they kept it -- it was underground, but they kept it alive and we practiced our ceremonies you know, in our homes. So these are the things you know, the strengths that we talked about during these women's sessions largely you know, with the women all across British Columbia.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Did you want a turn to (indiscernible) recommendation, okay.

**MS. MAVIS WINDSOR:** So before we move on I just would like to expand on what Leona had to share about the Heiltsuk and women -- Heiltsuk Haida women's sessions.

Over the last few years there's been some discussion on -- on the two communities having a women's gathering, and it did come to fruition at the end of February, we all -- there was 36 of us all together that went up to Haida Gwaii. We were so excited and they were excited because many of us hadn't been there ever in our
lives, and it was one of our bucket list items, so we all went up there, and as Leona said, it was very spiritual. It was very organic.

We talked -- the goal was to discuss issues -- common issues that affect the overall wellbeing of women in our communities, and we all left there feeling like we are now on another journey of -- as a group of women, and hopefully in the very near future addressing some of these issues will contribute largely to the wellness of women in our communities and -- and start some healing for families.

But I wanted to read the coastal unity declaration, or the coastal unity call to action. I think they have a copy of it on your -- okay. It was put up on the screen earlier, but I just wanted to bring -- to highlight it. I have it on my phone, just hang on, it was something that we as a group of women brought to the gathering -- the very last day when we were acknowledging -- when we were acknowledging our -- the work that we had been doing with the Haida group of women and so we felt it was really important to emphasize that it was coastal unity, the coastal unity of women of our -- our two communities, and we called it our commitment to action, "As women, aunties, mothers, daughters, and grandmothers, together we will protect the land and
the waters and the culture. We will do it in unity. This is our call to action."

And you'll see the -- one of the words that is on the screen is -- is (Speaking Hailhzaqvla language) and in our language it is one heart one mind, Gayaxsixa, thank you.

CHIEF MARILYN SLETT: So we also come bearing recommendations. And we'd like to go into that right now.

So recommendations that we have for -- for the Commission, the first is the recognition of Indigenous jurisdiction is an important step in addressing violence against women and the need to provide resources and assistance in this regard.

So one of the things -- and we talked about it quite a bit today, is the -- the Indian Act, and their jurisdiction that you know, the Federal Government still has over -- that it asserts over Indigenous communities. So the recognition of Indigenous jurisdiction is very important as a step going forward to address violence against women and the need to provide those resources as well.

Also connected to that is Heiltsuk recognition of our inherent right to self-government and that we no longer be treated as wards of the State, but as
Nations with collective rights. We also shared earlier today the strength of our -- of our Nation and the -- the self-sustaining Nations that -- that we had, and this is one of the visions behind that recommendation.

Another recommendation is a decolonized Canada where Indigenous communities enjoy the same standard of living as the rest of Canadians. And want -- it brings to me a -- a comment that one of my colleagues, Pamela Wilson (phonetic) shares with me. She's one of our elected counsellors, and when we talk about reconciliation and bridging the gaps she's really strong in saying our needs are not our desires. And you know -- you know, so this standard of living in equality is important but it isn't reconciliation in itself, it's a part of it.

And the support for Indigenous communities to develop their own domestic violence codes to reduce or deter domestic violence. I think that there's -- not, I think, I know, we have the solutions within our communities. We know what we need to do and -- and we have you know, the creativity and the courage and the capacity to be able to do that. And we also -- you know, have the benefit of looking at other communities to see what they've done, and you know, others have developed domestic violence codes you know, we've seen that example in the -- in the United States with the Cheyenne and the Hopi, you know, so
there's examples to look at.

And supporting reconciliation to achieve self-government which will address strengthening in our community, and that really goes back to the video that we shared earlier today and our vision around reconciliation on Heiltsuk's terms. You know, and -- and you know, for that reconciliation to be something it's really important for us to be able to (speaking Hailhzaqvla language) to turn something around and make it right again and those priority house posts are symbolic of the house posts of our -- of our big -- of big house, and it's foundational for the strength of our community, and it will be foundational for the healing of our community as well.

And I'll pass this to Leona, who will provide additional recommendations.

**MS. LEONA HUMCHITT:** Thank you. A lot of our recommendations are going to take commitment from Canada and the Provincial Government, not just -- just to the Heiltsuk but to Indigenous people from across Canada realistically.

I had the opportunity to listen to former Chief -- Grand Chief Bill Erasmus, and you know, back in the day you know, he's instrumental in working the Royal Commission on Aboriginal people you know, out of the Royal Commission came the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,
and there's a lot of other good work yet to be completed. And Canada has a role to play in truth and reconciliation. They go hand in hand.

This opportunity for truth telling today, and through the residential school work that was done we cannot have reconciliation if Canada doesn't know the truth of what happened.

And out of RCAP was the recommendation of a healing foundation. It started, but they -- they discontinued it. And we need to retrigger that process and we need to look at you know, communities that are -- are ready for self-governance, have been progressive in -- in being able to use them to help other people across Canada to get to that point, but realistically we will need high fund transfers from the Federal Government to enact all these recommendations.

The -- one of the recommendations we have is bringing birthing back to the communities, midwifery and bringing back birthing to the hospitals. As we mentioned Heiltsuk is a very remote isolated community. We have a small hospital with I believe, 12 beds and there's about six of those beds that are dedicated to long-term care because we don't have a long-term care facility.

But I want to say you know, it's for us as First Nations people, and I know it's not -- not just the
Heiltsuk, again that you know, to not be able to witness that beautiful, magical, miracle of birth -- for 25 years my daughters -- my youngest daughter is going to be 25 that's when they started sending Heiltsuk women out to facilities in the lower mainland to have their babies. And it's been 25 years that you know, our people or missing that most important part of the cycle of life, so we are burdened with you know -- you know, the end of life, you know, we -- we honour our loved ones, but we don't get to see the birthing anymore, so it's really important you know, that we bring that back to our -- our communities.

And so 25 years ago when I was ready to have my daughter they -- they tried to send me out and I said, No, I'm not going. I need my family to support me, and I stayed. And then I have an 18-year-old boy and I refused to leave as well. They couldn't make me, so I stayed, and I -- I -- I had my son in our -- in our own hospital.

And it's -- it's a really beautiful thing and we've -- we've been really progressive with -- in terms of research. We have a -- a local physician who loves the Heiltsuk people, who's done a lot of work with us, and has done research with UBC on the importance of bringing midwifery back to remote communications (sic) -- communities, sorry. And then I seen lately a communication that, I believe, the Manitoba women -- that they brought an
Indigenous midwifery program for them so that they could bring the birthing back to their communities, so it's -- it's good to know that this concern you know, goes across Canada.

We also wanted to make some recommendation about education. Two of our knowledge-keepers and former teachers together they did education and capacity building report so we have all the documentation about the different -- the different jobs and careers that we need from our Heiltsuk people in our community and we want to be able to build on that. We want to be able to facilitate life skills and employ -- employability skills, literacy programs, and more importantly financial literacy.

We have -- over the years managed poverty, we manage poverty through the programs and services that the Federal Government has given us over the years. And I want to highlight Minister Carolyn Bennett's statement about, "We want to move away from delivering programs and services and building institutions."

The Heiltsuk have done that. We have our own institution for stewardship; it's called the Heiltsuk Integrated Resource Management Department. We have a business arm, the Heiltsuk Economic Development Corporation. We own our school. We own our -- our -- our health department, and we're very progressive in -- in the
way that we need to continue to enhance these institutions. But once again you know, to be able to carry that out we're going to need those high fund transfer agreements with the Federal Government. We would like to see funding in place for college prep, college and university.

One of the fathers and builders -- builders of our Nation was a -- a -- a well respected community leader named Cecil Reid, he was the Chief counsellor in our Nation for many -- many -- many years. Cecil went to residential school, but he was one of the -- the few that were able to carry on and -- and acquire a career in education. He taught down in the lower mainland for a number of years and was called home.

Cecil, is that you? I love you.

But a very -- very well respected man, very grounded in cultural teachings. His -- his mentor -- his dear Aunt Gim (phonetic) was the one that -- that raised him and that taught him traditional values and the principles of being Heiltsuk.

We never shared earlier, but Heiltsuk means to speak and act correctly.

And he had all that groundings from his -- his grandmother -- or his aunt, sorry. And she always expressed to him you know, that we need to have sala (phonetic), we need to have the ideal behaviour to know
what our actions are going to entail. And -- one sec, bucula (phonetic), he also expressed that we had to have bucula, to be hard working, and that's really important because over the years as -- as Marilyn has -- has expressed, you know, through colonialism there's a real dependency that we're trying to move away from. And we know without a shadow of a doubt that our ancestors were hard working, and that's a kind of mentoring that we want to be able to do through some of these programs. We want to have a girl power program, healthy male mentorship program for young men.

We also want to acknowledge you know, that this process for murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls is very important, and that we're very holistic in our -- in our thoughts in our minds, in our hearts, and we want to remember the murdered and missing Indigenous men and young -- young guys.

We have a loved one that had gone missing a couple of years ago. His name is Max Brown (phonetic), and -- and it's in that that we again that we recognize you know, as a community we're all related one way or another by marriage or bloodline, so when we lose a community member we all feel it. And we just want to remember Max's family today because they have had no closure.

We want to be able to teach Heiltsuk values.
We want to be able to have funding to develop our own curriculum about Heiltsuk history, about Heiltsuk values and principles in our schools.

So those are some of the things that you know, we want to bring to light and recommend and -- and again that it's going to take -- it's going to take the government to work with us to meet these recommendations. Gayaxsixa.

MS. MAVIS WINDSOR: Okay, so moving on from what Leona was discussing.

We have -- we've had several discussions on the healing centre for trauma and family violence, and part of the programs that we would like to include and offer to our community our men's wellness programs, a cultural program for men, and bucula, as Leona mentioned, bucula programs for our men who, over the years due to many -- many factors, including economical factors, no longer go hunting. They don't go fishing. And many of our people don't know how to prepare our traditional foods. Many of our people no longer eat our traditional foods.

We also would like to have a women's centre. And an emergency shelter program or emergency shelter building, because more often than not we have homes in our community where there are three or four families living together in very crowded circumstances and that affects the
health and wellbeing of -- of not only you know, the women
in the family, but the men and the children and it can
create situations where there's tension and you know, just
it's not a very healthy situation.

We also would like to see an advocate program
for women and expanding our family support programs. I
know that they have offered parenting programs, as I said
earlier, through the Kaxla Child and Family Service Agency,
and certainly would like to you know, recommend that
parenting programs, not only in our community, but
throughout Canada be culturally appropriate because we all
have our -- what we call our -- our Gui'ilas, which is our
laws -- our laws of our ancestors, and -- and they were so
inclusive in the days of our ancestors that they addressed
things like domestic violence, they addressed things like
parenting, and that's no longer done in our traditional
houses anymore.

Drug and alcohol addiction programs and
single people -- single persons' advocate -- an advocate
for single people, and that's one of the longstanding
issues in our community is that our single people are
homeless, in many cases some of our single people are couch
surfing. And some of them have been on the emergency
housing list for 15 plus years. You know, so and I'm --
I'm sure many of issues are in many communities across
I'll pass the mic over to Joann and she talk about some cultural recommendations.

**MS. JOANN GREEN:** Gayaxsíxa. Again, I would like to thank you for taking the time to listen to us.

Earlier you heard Marilyn -- Chief Marilyn talking about her dad witnessing some of the earlier singing and dancing. In the 1960s my grandmother along -- Gerti White (phonetic) was my grandmother, Hanna Hall (phonetic), Beatrice Brown (phonetic), Mable (phonetic) Humchitt, Johnny (phonetic) Humchitt, would all get together in homes, and my grandmother would take me with her, and they would -- it was the women that did all of the singing and they would teach us how to sing and dance.

Today we are very fortunate to have a camp -- (Speaking Hailhzaqvla language) camp where our children go every summer, where they learn about who they are, where they find out about their identity through singing and dancing, and to us that's very important. For many families in our community all of that's been lost with the residential school.

It's frustrating when you think about how hard and how big of a job we're going to have to do all of these programs in the community when colonization took all of this away from us over 150 years ago. All the women in
our community are trying really hard to work together to
find ways to strengthen each other and strengthen our
cultural programs.

One of the things we see that's very
important is connecting our youth and our Elders together.
Our children continue to learn their singing and dancing.
Have family singing and dance programs on a weekly basis,
not just before potlatches, have a languageness program,
that so important. Language -- without our language we
don't really have a connection with our Elders.

Our Elders are our knowledge-keepers. They
have stories that connect us to our territory and those are
very important. It is our hope that we can have drum
making -- have a drum making program, cedar weaving.

Every summer our college takes staff and
students out to gather cedar, and for some of those young
people that we take out they've never been, and it's re-
connecting to our land and our resources and teaching them
how to strip cedar bark. It's overwhelming for some of
them.

Having art therapy is really important
because it's healing. Our -- our Heiltsuk art teaches our
children about who they are. Storytelling is really
important, bringing our Elders and youth together so that
they can reconnect. You know, with the breakdown of
families, you heard earlier than a lot of our grandmothers and our mothers lost the ability to parent. I often think about what my son said to me, "I wish I had the same kind of relationship you had with your grandparents when you were growing up," because there was a breakdown. You heard Leona talk about how important it is to have grandchildren and the feeling that you have. We need to bring that all back.

Making regalia is another important part of our Heiltsuk traditions, and it's making button blankets and vests for potlatching. Many of our own community members don't own those. It's something that we are fighting to bring back and teach them about how important it is to own those because it gives us strength.

When we have the regalia making, have language and storytelling at the same time, this connects our generations of families because our grandmothers and our aunties and our uncles will be passing their knowledge to their -- their grandchildren and their children.

Medicine gathering is such an important part of who we are. It's local harvesting, and developing small businesses. As I said, I work in the community college and I have an Elder in residence who is 78, I believe, and she makes traditional medicine. She prepares the medicine and she distributes it to community members. You heard Marilyn
say, "When the tide goes down our table is set." We open our back door and we have our pharmacy. That's where we get all of our medicine, you can walk up in the bush and you can pick (Speaking Hailhzaqvla language). You can pick Salal berry leaves, those are medicine. We pick -- you can go up into the forest and you can get cedar bark, you go in there and you get the hemlock branches for our (indiscernible), we're very rich. We're very rich. And it is our hope that you can take all this because these are very important recommendations, Gayaxsixa.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Did you want to do the presentation, but then kind of before we close with a song I'll ask the Commissioner (indiscernible) okay. So at this point actually I understand that there will be a presentation to the Commission to the National Inquiry, it's an art expression, and I believe that Chief Marilyn will be explaining it.

**CHIEF MARILYN SLETT:** One of the things we had reviewed when we were preparing for -- for this panel here today was the opportunity to provide some of our stories and strength through art expression, and this painting, or paintings -- my sister here in the -- in the shawl, here -- that's my younger sister Nicole Carpenter (phonetic), and she's joined with Jenna (phonetic), Mavis's daughter, and Nicole painted this and she went through a couple of
iterations in terms of putting something together. But I asked her to -- to paint something for the Inquiry, and to -- so she said -- she didn't hesitate, and she said okay. And my sister is very humble, she's -- she's an artist from the heart. She does a lot of it for -- with socializing with friends and -- and getting together, so she's self-taught, and this is probably -- probably her fifth or so painting, yeah.

And I asked her to -- to paint something for -- for today and she asked me, "Well, okay. What gives you strength?" And I shared with her that our families give us strength, our connection to the land and sea gives us strength, our connection to the living world gives us strength, our sisterhood gives us strength, and our ancestors give us strength, so she -- she went back and -- and she painted this. And it is -- you can see the women on the beach dancing, and she has my mother holding a copper, and myself holding a feather, and that's actually my blanket that she painted in, it's -- it's beautiful, and my sister and my niece -- Tracey's (phonetic) -- Nicole's daughter, Tracey, and you can see the -- the whale and the eagle, and these ladies over here are our ancestors.

So this is Nicole's painting, and she wanted to present it to -- to you today. And it represents the -- the strength of her -- of our women, and of our community...
and she's named them, the first one here is called, Bella Spirit, and on the bottom, Walk with Us.

So thank you. Did you want to look at that? We -- we just wanted to -- to share that it's something that Nicole has shared with some of the ladies that have been coming out, and I've been sharing with our ladies from our community, and just so proud of my sister and -- yeah, thank you for -- thank you for listening, and thank you for your attention to -- to everything that we're able to share today.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Chief Commissioner, I -- at this point if you have any questions or comments the panel would be happy to hear from you.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: I do have some questions to start with. With your women's declaration in particular, how do you give life to that? How do you hold people accountable to that declaration?

MS. MAVIS WINDSOR: Well, historically our women -- you've heard, our women are very strong. We come from a matriarchal society, and so you know, I believe that it will be our women that will -- will be the ones to take action and to ensure that the principles that they mentioned in their declaration, because it's their declaration, they own it, and I believe that -- that's where the ownership lies and that they will take
responsibility. They will take the stands that they need
to do to address the overall health and wellbeing of the
women in our communities.

Specifically for us, it's in our Heiltsuk
community, and the commitment -- the commitment that they
have to uplift each other and to make sure that the issues
that it -- that continue to impact their day to day lives
are -- are not -- are no longer pushed aside or shoved
under the carpet like they have been for many -- many
years, and that's -- that is to me what I -- when I listen
to the words that were penned. They came out of statements
that were made by our women, and the author who penned it,
she read everything that the women spoke to, and what she
felt they said is how she came to develop our declaration
-- our women's declaration, and so from my perspective you
know, I believe that it's time for the women in our
communities to stand up and say, no more. We matter, and
that our lives, and the health and wellbeing of our
children and our families are important.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: Thank
you. I'd appreciate your comments on some things that I've
heard from other communities across Canada who face similar
challenges because of geographical isolation.

I've been to your beautiful community several
times and I can see there are benefits of being isolated,
but also there are drawbacks to being isolated sometimes.

I've heard elsewhere in Canada that things like when we have to go through a turnover in teachers or nurses, or police, it's disruptive to our community, and that affects the safety of our women and girls, and it also affects the community because you have to constantly be re-educating the -- the nurses, the teachers, and police officers who come to your community, and they're not always the same and in their ability to do their job, or they're not always the same in -- in their philosophy about how they do their jobs, so I'm just wondering if you have any comments about -- if you've observed or experienced the same sort of issues about women's safety when there are turnovers in these types of positions, and then what you might see as a way of remedying those situations.

CHIEF MARILYN SLETT: Thank you for -- for that question. You know, certainly one of the -- the -- well, it was embedded in many of the recommendations that we had, the -- the lack of resources that our community has, and to be able to address the -- the issues that we talked about here today will take many people and collaboration between the Province and Canada and Heiltsuk talking and -- and collaborating, and also helping to provide some resources to be able to address them because these issues are -- are legacies of colonialism. So you
know, certainly for us some of the -- the gaps that we see are -- are certainly with mental health professional support within our community, and turnover is something that definitely we've seen.

And one of the things that has helped to provide continuity is providing training and support for our own people to fulfill those roles and not to have to depend on teachers and other professional resources to -- to come into town because really they only have a shelf life of a couple of years before they leave, and that's, if that.

So for us to -- to regain and -- and -- and heal and go through some of those recommendations it will mean that we need to have further investment in our communities so our people -- because we have the solutions. You know, we have -- you know, we talked about that earlier, we have the creativity that the human capacity you know, in terms of people that you know, are -- are going out for that training, but you know, there -- there is some gaps in that support and there is you know, more that we can do.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: I hope I don't put you in a difficult position by asking you this question, I apologize in advance if I do.

We've heard from woman leaders elsewhere in
Canada about how they've coped with being leaders, about the lateral violence that they've experiences because they are women leaders in their own communities, also because of really upsetting the status quo I suppose in some respects, I don't know if being in -- or being a matrilineal and -- and matriarchal society if it's perhaps different, but I just wonder if you would like to comment about the violence that is -- is lateral in our own communities.

CHIEF MARILYN SLETT: You know, certainly the challenges and the barriers you know, that we face -- and going back to some of the dialogue sessions that we talked back that the BCAFN had -- had hosted, there were women that were -- were in the audience or -- or within you know, participating, and when we were going the end of the session and had you know, sort of an open dialogue, some women were -- were getting up and saying, You know what, I'm going to run you know, for council. I'm going to run to be the Chief counsellor. I'm going to go home and form you know, a women's council. I'm going to go home and start these dialogue sessions at home.

And you know, the Haida people are an example of that, they -- they went back and hosted a variety of -- of women's dialogue sessions in Masset and Skidegate, in Queen Charlotte City, Port Clements, and -- and then their last session they invited the Heiltsuk women up and we
travelled two days to get up there by boats and by -- by car and -- and you know, Mavis had mentioned there were you know, 36 of us that went up, and some of our women from Vancouver you know, made the journey up as well and you know, but you know, certainly that network is a support for women in leadership as well because it is -- we do face you know, the -- the -- the lateral violence and we do face you know, the challenges of -- of being a female leader.

I'm my entering my tenth year as the elected leader for -- for Heiltsuk and it hasn't been without its challenges and you know, it's -- but it's supportive, you know, women supportive -- there are a lot of -- and I need to say this, a lot of spectacular men in our communities that support their -- their wives and support their mothers and their sisters in their leadership roles and you know, create that space you know, for us having that platform to -- to use our voices. But it is something that is -- is still in our communities and -- and it's a legacy of the -- of the oppression that, you know, we're -- we're still -- you know, living through and -- and you know, that still in our communities and you know, but there -- there is a movement you know, with women.

And I was thinking about that and I wrote some notes, and this is from the Haida session, that we're healing together and we're taking an intergenerational
approach and that our voices are our platform for action. And we have many women who enact changes in our community and we have a history of it.

So for us, you know, it's -- it's drawing on that strength to get us through the challenges that are still very much there today

**CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** I don't have any other questions now because there's so much for me to take in. I want to thank you all for being here. What you've said this afternoon is very important to our work, so I thank you for that. Also for me personally I'm so grateful that you came and -- and talked to us today because I've seen the -- the strength of the Heiltsuk women firsthand, and I'm so glad to be able to share that with the rest of Canada. So thank you all very much.

Also I -- I want to say that at times it's been very difficult to remain in my chair because I wanted to jump up and cheer for you.

I'm very grateful for your gift as well thank you.

You know, I don't necessarily have to tell you this, other parts of Canada I have to explain, but not so much with you, we have gifts because we're so grateful of the gifts you've given us today with your stories and your recommendations, your history, very important gifts to
us, we want to give you something back as best we can
today. We have Eagle Feathers for you to lift you up and
hold you up and -- and keep you flying high. To give you
courage when you need it, to give you comfort when you need
it as well. So we're very grateful and we -- we want to
keep you lifted up.

We also have some seeds for you. I think
they're the wild strawberry seeds. When we first started
this National Inquiry the Commissioners and I hoped that we
would help healing start and from healing new growth for
people. Well, it's already started, we're hearing back
from people about how they've re-claimed their rightful
positions in their communities, and women who have had the
-- found the strength after coming to talk to us to go to
the police and have their foster parents charged for
example, so there's wonderful growth happening, but we're
going to ask you to plant the seeds. I hope you have
better luck than I did in my backyard. If something grows
will you please, take a picture of it and send it to us for
a part of our legacy archive, but also it's a way to show
new growth because new growth is so important to have -- to
put new dreams in -- in the minds of our children.

As you said earlier, this is a big deal for
us too, so thank you so much for coming, it's been a -- a
real -- a real treat for me that you're here, so thank you
again, and I hope we do right by you by committing to a thorough and -- and good report that's going to move all of us forward. So I wish you a safe trip home to your families. I thank your families for sharing you with us today and -- and while you're here, and you've made a big difference -- all of you. Thank you very much.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Chief Commissioner, once the gifts are given out -- okay. Once the gifts are given out the panel has asked if they can finish with a song.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: Oh, of course, thank you, and after that we'll adjourn.

--- CLOSING SONG

--- Exhibits (Code P01P15P0202)

Exhibit 1: Folder containing 17 digital images displayed on monitors during the public panel’s testimony.

Exhibit 2: Heiltsuk Women’s Declaration, one-page text.

Exhibit 3: Video presented during the panel (106MB, 4 minutes 8 seconds, MP4 format).

Exhibit 4: Declaration by B.C. Indigenous Women.


--- Upon adjourning at 5:09 p.m.
LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST’S CERTIFICATE

I, Shannon Munro, Court Transcriber, hereby certify that I have transcribed the foregoing and it is a true and accurate transcript of the digital audio provided in this matter.

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Shannon Munro

April 14, 2018