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# Indigenous senators back Wilson-Raybould in letter

## Senator Murray Sinclair is among several who publicly support the Liberal MP's resignation from federal Cabinet

Bill Curry

Eight Indigenous senators have released a joint letter of support for Jody Wilson-Raybould following her resignation this week from the federal cabinet, noting the development leaves Canadians with many questions and concerns.

Six of the eight senators were appointed by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who said this week he was "puzzled" as to why Ms. Wilson-Raybould resigned.

The former minister announced her resignation Tuesday and said she retained former Supreme Court justice Thomas Cromwell to advise her on how much she can say publicly about the reasons for her decision in light of cabinet confidentiality and issues of solicitor-client privilege.

"The resignation of Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould from cabinet this week has led to a national conversation leaving many questions and concerns from Canadians, the Indigenous community and politicians alike," the letter states. "As the first Indigenous Attorney General of Canada and then as Minister of Veterans Affairs, it is without a doubt that this important decision was not taken lightly on her part."

The letter was distributed on Thursday by Senator Murray Sinclair, a former judge who led the Truth and Reconciliation Commission inquiry into Canada's history of Indian residential schools.

"We would like to acknowledge and commend former Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould for her accomplishments on the justice portfolio. While in that position, she displayed personal strength of character, integrity and dedication to modernize the justice system and work towards reconciliation ... Even though some will see this as a threat to the promise and process of reconciliation, it is not.

It is a measure of the distance we have yet to go and the challenges we have yet to overcome."

The list includes Senator Margaret Dawn Anderson, an Inuvialuk woman and former Government of Northwest Territories public servant, who was appointed in December but has not yet been sworn in as a Senator.

The other senators are Yvonne Boyer, Dan Christmas, Lillian Dyck, Brian Francis, Sandra Lovelace Nicholas and Mary Jane McCallum.

The Indigenous senators are planning to meet in person next week when the Senate resumes sitting for the first time since December. The group meets regularly when the Senate is in session.

The letter does not criticize the Prime Minister for his handling of the situation. However, the fact it was sent puts Mr. Trudeau on notice that Indigenous senators - who represent a significant voting block in the 105-seat chamber - are watching his actions closely.

The controversy emerged last week after The Globe and Mail reported Ms. Wilson-Raybould was pressed by the Prime Minister's Office when she was attorney general to shelve a criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin in favour of a negotiated settlement.

Many Indigenous leaders - including Ms. Wilson-Raybould's father Bill Wilson - sharply criticized the Prime Minister's handling of the situation. On Wednesday, Liberal MPs on the House of Commons justice committee overruled an opposition request to invite Ms. Wilson-Raybould to appear as a witness to explain what happened. The Liberal majority voted instead to hold hearings on the broader issues involved and to meet again on Feb.

19 to discuss additional witnesses.

Mr. Trudeau addressed Liberal MPs this week during a private conference call as the government attempts to manage the controversy.

Liberal MP Francis Scarpaleggia, the chair of the national Liberal caucus, told The Globe he is not hearing strong concern from MPs over the Prime Minister's handling of the resignation. "We're a very cohesive team that looks to the leadership of the Prime Minister and that hasn't changed in any way, shape or form as far as I can see," he said Thursday. Mr. Scarpaleggia said the Liberal caucus will meet in Ottawa and he expects Ms. Wilson-Raybould will attend as a Liberal MP.

Carolyn Bennett, the federal Minister for Crown-Indigenous Relations, told The Globe the government's reconciliation efforts will continue and praised her former cabinet colleague.

"Her advice was invaluable as a candidate and member of our team. I am truly proud of the work we have been able to do together," she said. "Her dedication to fundamental change in Canada's relationship with First Nations is unparalleled - she will continue to be a strong voice and I hope to continue working with her on these critical issues. Since day one the Prime Minister has made reconciliation a top priority for this government and parliament, and we are dedicated to continuing that work."