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Chair

The Honourable MaryAnn Mihychuk

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.)): Let's get started. Our guests have come in. They've travelled a long way, and we're fascinated to hear their stories.

You're at the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs of the Parliament of Canada. Pursuant to Standing Order 108 (2) we are doing a study on northern infrastructure projects and strategies.

Before we get started, we want to recognize that we are on the unceded territory of the Algonquin people. It is a process of recognition of our heritage, our history, and our goal of truth and reconciliation.

You'll have 10 minutes to present, whether you're the sole presenter or you're sharing time. That's up to you. I will give you signals when you're getting close to your limit. Try to keep it under 10 minutes so we don't have to get that close. After the presentations, we'll do rounds of questioning from members of Parliament.

First, I want to welcome a person I've worked with for many years, the mayor of the town of Churchill, Michael Spence.

Welcome to the committee.

Mr. Michael Spence (Mayor, Town of Churchill): Thank you. I am honoured to address the committee this afternoon.

As mayor of the town of Churchill, I am keenly aware of the importance of northern infrastructure projects and strategies. It is vitally important that infrastructure in the north be improved to meet the needs of residents, local governments, and business in the Arctic and sub-Arctic. We have been part of the emerging federal government Arctic policy framework. Actually, the first hearing in our community was held about a year ago. Later today, I'll be presenting to the Senate Special Committee on the Arctic. I am looking forward to that.

As you know, Churchill has had a long history of working with Inuit from the Keewatin, which is now the Kivalliq region of Canada. The Inuit have lived at and near Churchill for thousands of years, and continue to do so today. For us as a sub-Arctic community, this is an important part of our history and Canadian history.

Churchill was part of the Northwest Territories until 1911. Churchill itself was the administrative capital of the Keewatin

district of the NWT until the early 1970s. In fact, students from the region came to Churchill for their high school. Our hospital continues to serve the region.

Resupply for the region came almost exclusively from Churchill through the Hudson Bay Railway and the port for several decades, a long-standing connection. As a sub-Arctic port, rail line terminal and airport, Churchill shares common goals with our Nunavut neighbours for developing Arctic infrastructure and a strong Arctic economy, while protecting the environment and preserving the Arctic biodiversity. Our infrastructure can continue to serve a regional purpose and contribute to a more prosperous Arctic. That's our goal.

As most committee members are aware, Churchill recently faced its most challenging time with the loss of the rail and the layoff of port workers. However, about a month ago, on August 31, the federal government announced a major investment to the Churchill port, marine tank farm, and railway.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge this significant and strategic investment by the federal government into our region. It allowed the transfer of these assets to the new ownership, called the Arctic Gateway Group, a joint local and private sector co-ownership group. This is a historic partnership that will truly lead to greater prosperity for our region.

Immediately following the acquisition, repairs to the rail line were initiated, and we are now in the final stages of finishing the repairs. We anticipate the first train into our community hopefully within two weeks. Our rail line and port can serve the broader Arctic community through resupply. They have in the past, and we look forward to re-establishing important relationships.

Along with the only rail line that reaches the Arctic, our marine tank farm and our port, the Churchill airport is a critical part of the supply chain and already has some major assets. It was built as a military airstrip and can handle the largest aircraft on the planet. Currently, it is underutilized, and it has great potential to serve as a seamless partner with the rail line to ship goods across the north.

We began discussions with the federal government over expanded use of the airport and tying it to the port and rail line as part of the efforts to create a true Arctic gateway. We will position the airport to take on an expanded mandate to serve the greater needs of the Arctic, and we look forward to discussions with leaders and residents of the north regarding the Churchill airport initiative.

We want to partner on further investments linking our airport to the existing infrastructure of our port and rail line. It only makes sense to maximize this infrastructure for the benefit of all Arctic communities. We see this as a new strategic investment. In this, you'll have climate-controlled warehousing; linking railway tracks directly to the tarmac, creating an integrated supply chain; and the installation of specialized off-loading equipment.

• (1535)

Churchill can play an important role in further reducing food insecurity in the north through investments to bring resupply costs down.

The Hudson Bay regional round table, which consists of the governments of Manitoba and Nunavut, the seven Kivalliq hamlets in Nunavut, the towns of Churchill and Gillam, the Sayisi Dene First Nation and the Fox Lake Cree Nation, has worked to promote regional interests and development. We have held meetings in Manitoba and Nunavut on a variety of joint initiatives.

One of the top priorities has been the need to replace diesel use in the Kivalliq communities. In 2014, following a Hudson Bay regional round table proposal, a scoping study was initiated for a hydro-electric transmission line from northern Manitoba to the communities and mines in the Kivalliq district. This followed the 1999 study by Manitoba Hydro. The scoping study found that there was a strong economic and environmental case to be made for the transmission line, which would bring clean, reliable and affordable energy and fibre optics to the Kivalliq region.

The Kivalliq Inuit Association has taken that report to the next step and has made major progress in advancing that project. We support their efforts to get the transmission line and fibre optics project funded and built. This is a nation-building project that will contribute to economic growth and clean energy, as well as vastly improve Internet access to the Kivalliq region.

The federal government has taken a leadership role in efforts to reduce the use of fossil fuels.

Churchill is uniquely placed to contribute to Arctic and sub-Arctic science and to protecting our environment. The Churchill Northern Studies Centre has a strong reputation for its work on researching these issues. The Churchill marine observatory, for which construction will be completed next year, will be the only such project in the world carrying out specific studies on climate change. Churchill's other infrastructure, including the health centre, was built to serve the region and beyond.

We remain an international destination for tourism as the polar bear capital of the world, while expanding our markets for summer beluga and birding tours, and the winter northern lights.

In conclusion, we are proud to work with our Arctic partners on closing the infrastructure gaps in the north to promote clean growth and benefits to the Arctic and all of Canada.

I want to thank the committee for inviting me here this afternoon. I am confident that you will bring forward recommendations on northern infrastructure that will help advance economic development for the Arctic and Arctic communities. The federal government has the ability to unlock the potential of our region by supporting the

power line and fibre optic project into Kivalliq, and by supporting our initiative to link our rail lines to the airport.

It's critically important to indicate that these assets are situated in our community, but they are assets that belong to the region. Let me be clear on that.

Thank you.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move to the next presenters. They have come all the way down from Tuktoyaktuk.

Have you driven down? We're excited about your new road. It's a long way.

Mr. Mervyn Gruben (Mayor, Hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk): We drove on part of it.

The Chair: Welcome to Ottawa and to our committee.

You have up to 10 minutes to present. Please go ahead.

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: I'd like to thank you all for this opportunity to speak again on our cause. There are a couple of issues I wanted to address: our deep-sea port for our community of Tuk, and our natural gas location for the region. It's not necessarily just for Tuk. If you look at our community of Tuk, it's right on the Arctic Ocean.

First of all, sorry, I'm Mervyn Gruben, mayor of Tuktoyaktuk.

I'll go backwards here again. It's kind of déjà vu. In 2012, I was invited to come here and speak to a panel as well. I think it was just about the same people, or the same panel. We did such a good presentation in the fall of 2012, that in February 2013 our friend Mr. Flaherty—rest in peace—announced in the budget that we were going to get \$199 million for our highway. That was the beginning of our Tuk-Inuvik highway. I don't know why we call it Tuk-Inuvik highway. I like to call it the highway to Tuk. It's just the finishing off of the Dempster Highway, the Diefenbaker highway. That's what it should be, the road to resources.

Anyway, we got this highway built, and unbelievably, this year we had 5,000 people come to Tuk—5,000 tourists. On a good year, we get maybe 2,500. You know, everybody wants to jump in the ocean, of course. It's just a total game-changer.

Yes, I hope to get the same response as we got in 2013 from the federal government here.

As you know—or you might not know—the Mackenzie River is continually lowering. The water level is getting lower and lower, and it's getting more unpredictable to ship. The times of the season when we can ship are getting later and later. You can't ship too late because the water goes down too low.

So we finished with the highway to Tuk, and then what I proposed to the GNWT and a lot of the powers that be was that you can truck anything from the south to Tuk all winter, stockpile all the material you need there. We have the infrastructure for storage and the fuel tank storage, and the land available, but we really need to develop our docking facilities and possibly dredge the entranceway a bit into the harbour.

One big advantage I propose is that, if we haul in the stuff all winter on the roads, then we can ship out a lot earlier to the communities. Paulatuk didn't get its sealift this year. They're flying everything in right now. Also Cambridge Bay and Kugluktuk, they didn't get all of their shipment. Paulatuk didn't get anything at all. They didn't get any of their fuel, none of their food. Now they're flying their stuff in, right now. Just imagine what that's going to cost at the end of the day, what the government is going to pay at the end of the day. It's going to be coming from us.

You know, it would make all the sense in the world to work along with it, but it's falling on deaf ears.

I was just in Anchorage, speaking to a similar panel on expanding the Tuk port and trying to get the Coast Guard presence, talking about building up a bigger Coast Guard presence. You know the Northwest Passage is right there. It's at our front door. You can see the ships coming and going along, and we have nothing in the north, in our region, that's there for support, should anything go wrong. We have increased cruise ships passing. We have increased pleasure boats back and forth, and yet we're not prepared. You look at Trump. He's trying to open up the ANWR, and that's right next door to us. If something happens, we're not prepared. We're not ready.

I've been calling on the Coast Guard for many years to develop our region, just in case something happens, and yet they don't do anything. Actually, they did. They built the Coast Guard office in Inuvik, which is 80 miles to the south, nowhere near the coast, and it doesn't help anybody. As I said, I was just in Anchorage, and none of the Canadian Coast Guard was there. We had Coast Guard U.S.A. and all the national defence from the Americas. Some people from Ottawa were there as well, and I met with them. We were all shaking our heads at why the Coast Guard was not there. They were invited.

Things like that have to change. You know, you're putting Coast Guard boats all over, in different parts of the eastern Arctic, that are too far to be effective, to be helping anybody. So they have to give their heads a shake and come to work with us before something really drastic happens.

I was talking to Michael McLeod, our MP for the western Arctic, and he said, "Yes, Merven, we should be doing something. We should be helping you guys."

• (1545)

I agree the Liberals should be helping us. They shut down our offshore gasification and put a moratorium right across the whole freaking Arctic without even consulting us. They never said a word to us.

We're proud people who like to work for a living. We're not used to getting social assistance and that kind of stuff. Now we're getting tourists coming up, but that's small change compared to when you work in oil and gas and you're used to that kind of living. Our people

are used to that. We're not used to selling trinkets and T-shirts and that kind of stuff. But oil and gas is going to come back, I think, if you guys help us build this port and make it more attractive and help us build it up a little better and safer.

Years ago, there were very good ports from old Dome and Canmar, Gulf and Imperial. They were good and they were very usable, but they've been slowly deteriorating over the years. There are three ports in Tuk, one of them owned by MTS, which is the Government of NWT. It's part of Bob's navy.

We need some help with that infrastructure.

The second part is about our natural gas. We're sitting on trillions of cubic feet of natural gas. It's right under our feet, yet we're shipping diesel and gasoline from far away. And in Inuvik they're getting their natural gas from Delta, B.C. They're paying \$35 a gigajoule, and it's totally nuts.

Up in Tuk, we're still burning diesel, and yet 13 kilometres out of town we have trillions of cubic feet of natural gas sitting there. We just need a production well, and then we turn on the valve into the LNG plant and away we go.

Some of the stuff is simple for us, but again, it's so hard for the government to fathom and get around. It's so much easier for them to keep on doing what they're doing and shipping their dirty fuel up north. Everybody wants to go with the freaking fans or the wind turbines and pipe stuff, but that stuff never works up there. They've tried it in different areas and it just doesn't work.

I'm speaking too much. I have to let Jackie say a few words here, if I may.

The Chair: Mr. Jacobson, you have two and a half minutes.

Hon. Jackie Jacobson (Councillor, Hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk): Thank you, Mr. Mayor, and thank you, Madam Chair.

Just in regard to what my mayor brings forward, we're resource-rich and cash-poor. That's where we are now in my home community of Tuktoyaktuk.

I'm a former Speaker of the Northwest Territories and a former MLA. For the last three years, I've seen it getting worse and worse in regard to our relying too much on government handouts. The stuff that we are getting is not enough to do anything with.

The biggest thing we have to do is try to work together to make Tuk a deep-sea port, doing it privately with another country, and that's the way it's looking right now. We've had the Chinese—the CCCC, the harbour company out of China—come in to look at Tuk harbour, looking at a deep-sea port.

As my mayor said, we have 33 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, and yet we bring it from Delta, B.C., which is clogging up our highways right through the Yukon, coming all the way up through the Yukon and doing a 48-hour shot from Delta to bring it up. How dangerous is that?

It's not only safety. As my mayor said, we're a proud people. We want to do it ourselves and we are going to get it done, with or without any assistance. We're working toward that. We want to make sure that my Inuvialuit people, my people of Tuk and all my youth, are taken care of because they are the lost ones.

Everyone has to graduate and leave town. Two of my kids are living in the Yukon. No jobs.... That's one thing you guys have to think about.

It's so easy to sit down here and make judgments on people and lives that are 3,500 clicks away, and make decisions on our behalf, especially with that moratorium on the Beaufort. That should be taken away, lifted, please and thank you. That is going to open up and give jobs to our people—training and all the stuff we're wishing for.

Our territorial government is not coming up to the plate right now.

Thank you for listening, and I look forward to any questions.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We can all hear the passion in your voices and the opportunities that are there waiting for you, and for all of us. Thank you for your presentation.

We'll go to the rounds of questions from the members.

We're going to start with MP Larry Bagnell.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for your passionate and great...letting us know what's really happening on the ground.

As you know, I'm the closest MP to you in Tuk, other than yours. I can drive there now, which is very exciting. I haven't been there yet, but I'd love to get up that road.

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: Just fix the road first.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Fix the road first....

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Larry Bagnell: That's what I wanted to ask about.

Climate change is playing havoc with our roads in the Yukon. Just a couple of weeks ago, I announced \$2 million for science and equipment to try to mitigate the effect on the permafrost, the heaves that we have in our roads, and the safety issues that's causing. With your experience on the ground, having lived there for a long time, I was just wondering how you see any changes related to climate change, particularly how it's affecting infrastructure.

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: It is melting. It is melting big time.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Is that even in the communities?

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: As you probably know, the whole circumpolar world is melting, and there's really nothing they can do. We're having problems with erosion along the communities and all the beaches across the Arctic.

With infrastructure, yes, of course, even in our communities the roads are melting. Every year they're getting lower and lower. We have to keep putting in more gravel, and it's the same with the

highway. Even in the wintertime it's still sinking. It's happening year-round. You know as well as I do that we don't get 40-below weather anymore. Traditionally, in January, February and March we had a solid 40 below, but we're lucky if we get any 40 below weather at any time now.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: On the foundations of buildings, does that affect you?

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: Yes, but everybody is on pilings.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Right.

Your suggestion related to the Coast Guard is interesting. Where is the closest place to Tuktoyaktuk where the Coast Guard or the navy actually docks a ship?

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: There's a small sub-base in Tuk. There are bigger bases in Hay River, but there is really no base at Tuk. There is an unmanned station, but basically they just store buoys and stuff.

Hon. Jackie Jacobson: Also.... Sorry, Mr. Mayor.

Larry, their office is in Inuvik, which as you know is 148 kilometres upriver. It's no closer to the ocean. When they come into Tuk, they tow their boat from Inuvik to do some of their exercises. They can't even come down the river to navigate the mouth of the river. The mouth of the river is really bad, too, with the siltation. The silt has to be dredged within the next few years; otherwise it's going to be impassable. In some areas you're drawing five feet of water.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: So they dock at Inuvik instead of at Tuk?

Hon. Jackie Jacobson: Yes. But when they drive, they have to drive their boat from Inuvik to Tuk on a trailer—offload in Tuk and go out of Tuk.

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: They're search and rescue boats, by the way

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Okay.

I have some more questions, but I'd better give Churchill a chance here, too.

First of all, you said that you were part of the NWT at one time. The Yukon was part of that NWT empire, too, until the gold rush, when we became the Yukon.

I just want to know what your experience is with climate change and infrastructure in the area. Looking a long way into the future, I've always predicted, actually, that the Arctic Ocean is going to melt faster than even the scientists are saying. When that's melted, could you tell us a bit about what the opportunities would be? I'm sure you've had studies on the economic opportunities of shipping from Churchill.

Mr. Michael Spence: That's an interesting question, actually. We have Dr. Barber, who heads the climate change aspect at the University of Manitoba, and he's the ice expert. He has indicated, in his presentations to us and others, that the Hudson Bay and the Hudson Strait are going to be ice-free within 30 years. So, potentially you're going to have a port that will be able to operate year-round. It's quite significant.

When we look at this, yes, there are challenges with climate change, but the fact is there are also benefits. For our location, we're looking at this as strictly benefits, and that's the way we'll look at it.

Are we excited about the future? We're always excited about the future, because you have to have the vision to drive that. We're pretty excited about the latest investment by the federal government. We believe it's not only our community that this is going to benefit; it's going to benefit the region.

As I said, what's really important here is the fact that we're talking about not only a community, but a region. The benefits will be there.

• (1555)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: What would you ship, and where?

Mr. Michael Spence: We would ship, for instance, resupply to communities further north of us, or have products going in. It could be fertilizer, or it could be grain going to China. You can look at what's happening with Russia and China in terms of what they're doing with their northern coasts. There are some huge benefits and investments that are going into those northern countries, and we have to start doing it.

But I think it's a start. We're very happy with what we have.

Thank you.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: I have one last quick question for Mayor Gruben.

I understand that in the Gulf of Mexico spill there were 5,000 boats involved. Do you think the federal government should be investing more money in how to clean up an oil spill under ice, which would be quite a challenge? I think we should be investing, but do you think we should be investing in that research?

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: Definitely. We need to get ahead of the game.

When you look at the big reserve that BP and Imperial have, they're still on that. They're still interested in developing that. That's a \$1.2-billion bid that they put on that one, and with the moratorium out there they shut everything down.

In the last four years or whatever, we should have been getting ready to research this kind of stuff. What I suggest is building up an oil spill response community and all the facilities that you need in our community, especially now that we have a year-round road that can get stuff out summer or winter.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Thank you, Madame Chair.

The Chair: Questioning now moves to MP Cathy McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you to both the witnesses for coming today.

I'm going to start by saying that my husband was one of those 5,000 who went up the road to your community.

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: Oh, cool.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: He only dipped his toe in the Beaufort, so I can't imagine people taking the full plunge.

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: Some of them are naked. I don't think he was one of them.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I saw the picture of the toe.

I think it leads to a good point. Tourism is important, but for him it was a day in and maybe they had lunch and a cup of coffee and there wasn't much opportunity.

You talked about the Beaufort Sea and a very arbitrary.... As I understand it, there was a 20-minute call before there was a drilling moratorium announced, with no consultation with the premiers or with the communities. This government likes to talk about nation-to-nation consultation and transparency.

Can you talk about what that moratorium did to your dreams and opportunities?

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: Like I said, our region has been in the oil and gas industry since the late 1800s. Our first people were impacted by the whale hunters. That was our first taste of the oil boom. It's happened four or five times since then. We work very well and we're really proactive. We're pro-development. We want things to happen.

Since that happened, I've noticed in our community that a lot of people have been just.... We were lucky enough in that time frame that we were developing the Tuk highway and people were happy. They were buying stuff. They were buying houses, skidoos, trucks and all this stuff, and now there are so many people on social assistance.

The young people are even calling it payday now. The mentality of the young ones is just so different from a generation ago, when everybody was ashamed to be.... You'd go on welfare only when you needed it. Now it's payday.

Like I said, our people like to work. They want to work, and this moratorium just slammed everyone back down. There's absolutely no development in oil and gas up there right now, besides what we're working on, the preliminary stuff with the natural gasification of M-18. That's something we're working on at this moment, but we just need a little more push here.

• (1600)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: This might not impact the territories as much, but certainly we have Bill C-69, which is working its way through Parliament.

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: That's another bad one.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: People are suggesting that it's basically a "no more pipeline, no more development" bill. It sounds like you're familiar with it.

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: Yes, definitely.

That's just going to be another nail in the coffin for a lot of infrastructure and oil and gas projects that we're working on in the north. There are already so many hurdles. You can't do anything up there. You almost need a permit to go to the washroom outside before...on the highway.

There are enough hurdles in place already, and it's just slowing things down. I think there are already enough environmental or land administration people, the ILA. They're there to look after it already. We don't need any more complications to slow things down.

Everybody's turning green here on us. We're going to turn green from starvation pretty soon.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: We have Bill C-69, and we have an arbitrary moratorium. I understand that all the major Inuit organizations have now walked away from nutrition north, because that conversation has not been going so well, I guess, not actually seeing action from a government that made some significant promises.

In the last government, I think we had a reasonable Arctic policy framework. Maybe a new government wants to rejig it, but it sounds like we've spent three years now on that from the very start, again.

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: I haven't seen anything from this new government. They haven't helped us at all.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Have you been consulted on this new—

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: No. I have no idea what you're talking about.

Jackie?

Hon. Jackie Jacobson: There has been no consultation.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: We could have something that will be presented sometime soon, which will be an Arctic policy framework, but you haven't had any—

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: I'm not familiar with it, no.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Okay.

Jackie, go ahead.

Hon. Jackie Jacobson: Thank you.

In regard to what the mayor is saying, there has been no help whatsoever since this moratorium. We have the road built now. There's no funding for a restaurant to buy coffee and no hotels in Tuk. It's all B & Bs. We've had over 5,000 visitors. When I was driving out of Tuk, the day before yesterday, there was a 40-foot camper that was still trying to come to Tuk in -15°C and it's all whiteout now.

That being said, getting back to that moratorium, you basically handcuffed us in regard to anything that's going to go on—or no, sorry, whoever did it. I'm just saying it has to be lifted. We want to work. We want to be able to do good for our people.

In regard to the offshore, as the mayor said, we've been doing it since.... We were doing it in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. We were doing it before the east coast. That's where the action was happening in the 1980s, in Tuktoyaktuk. All the ice technology was done in Tuk. Now, all the icebreaker technology has been all over; that same hull is being designed now.

There are so many pieces to the puzzle. You can go back and say, "this, this and this", but at the end of the day, we just need that moratorium lifted, to give our opportunity to us. You may not hear our territorial government beating the drum for us, saying that we need that lifted, but we do need it lifted for the people we represent,

the people of Tuktoyaktuk. If you get the oil and gas going there, you're going to affect nine communities that surround Tuk.

The mayor of Churchill said we're going to affect nine communities. Even in Nunavut, from Kugluktuk on this side, they always came to Tuk to work because we had fly-in, fly-out. Yellowknife is just like a big vacuum. Yellowknife got their diamond mine, so everything is okay for them. They're okay. They have jobs. People in the smaller rural communities, in the Nunakput area and the coastline communities, they're the ones who are hurting. Our youth are hurting.

You guys have it pretty cushy down here, in regard to living. If you come up to Tuk and come visit, you'll see our youth. We need help from this government to lift that moratorium.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you.

The questioning now moves to MP Rachel Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you.

Thank you for being here with us today.

I'll start with you, Mayor Gruben, if I could. One of the things you talked about was the challenges with siltation. Can you tell us a little about what that looks like? Is that happening because of climate change? You talked about needing to dredge it out. Could you just tell us a bit about what that would look like?

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: With the siltation, that's natural. That has been happening as long as the rivers have been running. In the past, when the government used to run northern transportation, they'd dredge it constantly, at least every two, three or four years. They had their own dredges.

After the government slowly got out of it, they sold all that equipment, so nobody's doing it anymore.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I represent a southern riding, and if it snows this much, everybody stays at home because they don't know what to do. I grew up in a more northern community, but that's the reality, and I do represent a lot of remote communities. To get their food and to get their resources, it's so expensive because you have to ship it out—it goes on boats and it goes on planes.

One of the things you talked about was that whole shipping part being such a challenge. When things have to be flown out to communities, how much more of a cost is put on those resources?

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: There's a pro here. He did a lot of shipping

Hon. Jackie Jacobson: Yes, I know the—

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: —but it is at least double and sometimes triple.

You are familiar with these. In our day, it's worse.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I really want to make sure that we understand this in the committee, because for you guys it's a reality. For so many of us here, we don't have a number to attribute to it. I want to make sure that when we do the report it's reflected really clearly. If you have any information on that, it would be helpful.

Hon. Jackie Jacobson: In regard to the shipping, for four litres of milk in Sachs Harbour, say, you're probably paying about \$24. In Inuvik, it's about \$13. If you start flying it in now, supposedly no cost is going to get passed on to the customer; it's going to go to the territorial government.

They have planes parked in Inuvik hauling all the freight out of Inuvik right now, which is probably going to take about two to three weeks of straight flying—when they could have trucked it into Tuk before and had it shipped out two months earlier. They were too focused on their sailing time for the fuel. I'd say the increase in cost is probably between 30% and 40%.

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: Yes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: That's perfect. Thank you.

You also talked about the Coast Guard. I'm curious. I was in another committee, the national defence committee. We had different levels of the military, especially the navy, talking about tourists thinking that they can just go up there, that it's all melted and everything is good, but it's not, so search and rescue is dealing with that.

I'm wondering if you're experiencing any of that, because you talked about really needing the search and rescue and the Coast Guard there on the ground. Is that one of the issues you're dealing with?

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: We have another pro here. He's with the rangers as well. They do a lot of search and rescue.

Hon. Jackie Jacobson: Last year, we had 23 sailboats come into Tuk harbour.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Wow.

Hon. Jackie Jacobson: Some of them were coming all the way from the Bahamas and passing through.

On the Coast Guard aspect of it, they are starting a Coast Guard auxiliary, but we're not there yet. They're just getting their boats started and stuff like that. All power to them, and I wish them all the best, but I've been in the Canadian Rangers for 20-some years now. I'm the sergeant back home. We do all the search and rescue with the RCMP and work hand in hand to get stuff like that done.

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: Yes. They do all the search and rescue, not the Coast Guard.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: That's interesting.

You talked about being left out of the consultation process and how you don't even really know what that looks like. From your perspective, what would a meaningful consultation process actually look like?

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: Do you mean on a moratorium?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Yes.

Hon. Jackie Jacobson: Just open it back up.

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: Yes, that's what we've been calling for. If we'd had any say, we would never have closed it, because we were working on a lot of stuff on the offshore at the time. Then to just blanket the whole Arctic.... That was a crazy thing to do. The government owes it to us to open it up now and at least start training. We have to train our people.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: How do you think a consultation process would actually be more meaningful? I understand you're saying that this is what you want, but just not having it happen.... What would you have expected to see happen?

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: Well, come to our community and hear what our people have to say.

Hon. Jackie Jacobson: Listen to the shareholders and to the land claim groups, instead of the way things rolled out. It's not right.

• (1610)

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: The whole region was dumped. Nobody in our whole community.... I'm friends with everybody in all these other communities. Nobody was consulted.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm surprised by that.

You also talked a bit about the use of diesel and how concerning that is for you. I'm also curious about the age of the infrastructure for the diesel. We've definitely heard from other people who have come to the committee and talked about how it's aging out and how much of a concern it is in some situations where the power has been knocked out in the middle of winter and you have to respond to that.

If you could you talk about the actual infrastructure for the diesel, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: The power station is not that old, maybe 15 or 20 years—

Hon. Jackie Jacobson: Yes.

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: —but you're always getting power outages in the wintertime. That's guaranteed. Storms are always knocking power lines off. The storms never stop. It's a given. I have a backup generator in my house. You know the power is going to go out, but it's the same in any other community.

What we're planning to do with natural gasification for our community is to run the whole community's generators on natural gas and power and heat the whole town on electricity. There are still going to be lines down sometimes and that kind of thing, of course, but you're burning a cleaner fossil fuel. For years and years, we've been burning diesel. I don't know why. We're sitting right on top of trillions of cubic feet of natural gas....

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I have one quick question. We heard a lot from other folks about the challenges with housing in your community. Is that something you're experiencing as well?

Mr. Mervyn Gruben: Yes, big time. Everywhere we're short. We have teachers staying in substandard—

Hon. Jackie Jacobson: The territory is short 2,300 houses.

Mr. Merven Gruben: Yes, and our place is probably about a hundred short. We have teachers staying in substandard housing already. We're just not building affordable housing fast enough. Jackie and I are lucky enough to own our houses, and they're not cheap to run, let alone build and maintain them yourself.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Questions now go to MP Don Rusnak.

Mr. Don Rusnak (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mayor Gruben, you talked a lot about the ban on drilling in the Beaufort Sea. How much work got done between the early 2000s and 2014 in the Beaufort Sea?

I'm reading an article here that says Royal Dutch Shell and a couple of other companies pulled out. They said the line is \$150 per barrel to make it economically viable for projects in that region. Were there a lot of projects going on before the ban?

Mr. Merven Gruben: Jackie's familiar with it....

Hon. Jackie Jacobson: Yes, thank you, Mr. Rusnak.

When Royal Dutch Shell pulled out of the Arctic on our side—on our Beaufort—they pulled out the Kulluk, the drilling platform that was supposed to drill in the Chukchi Sea. That was the only impact we had, from 2007. For four years, from 2004 to 2007, they were there, just trying to fix up the drilling rig itself.

Mr. Don Rusnak: They were there up to 2007.

Hon. Jackie Jacobson: Yes.

Mr. Don Rusnak: Okay. So they left after 2007.

Hon. Jackie Jacobson: Yes. They moved the asset over to Alaska, and they had to underpower the—

Mr. Don Rusnak: How much drilling is happening on the Alaskan side?

Hon. Jackie Jacobson: They are not drilling right now. The Chukchi is supposed to be opening up. They're really making headway, but the thing about Tuk—

Mr. Don Rusnak: I imagine it's extremely expensive to operate oil and gas wells in the Beaufort or anywhere in the Arctic. I'm from northwestern Ontario. I know that operating mines in northwestern Ontario is much more expensive than operating a mine in, say, northern Minnesota, which isn't that far away but the infrastructure to bring in equipment, people and all the other things you need to operate these very intensive pieces of infrastructure is there. The price point for either minerals or oil has to be at a certain level before it's economically viable.

I'll put it to you that it wasn't economically viable up until 2007, and that's why Shell pulled out.

Hon. Jackie Jacobson: Shell pulled out because they were going to drill in the Chukchi Sea. They were preparing the rig to go drill in the Chukchi.

Mr. Don Rusnak: Okay.

Has the region, or the Northwest Territories government or the hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk, prepared any other plans? I've been listening to Mayor Spence from Churchill, and I had a brief conversation. I know the chair represents Manitoba.

It's actually music to my ears to hear that Churchill is going in a different direction. In the past, it competed directly with the port of Thunder Bay for grain. Having a plan that makes Churchill a service centre for the north, with the infrastructure and investing in that infrastructure—seeing a way past the subsidies of the past and going a new way that's economically viable—is something that I think all Canadians can be proud of, and get behind and support.

Even for a member of Parliament from Thunder Bay, who directly competed with your port before, hearing that is music to my ears. Can you talk a little more about the plans Churchill has to become a regional service centre, and the infrastructure Churchill will need to realize that economic opportunity?

● (1615)

Mr. Michael Spence: What was really required was.... The infrastructure we had was getting tired. The previous owner didn't reinvest.

We put together a group of Bay Line communities, along with communities north of us in the Kivalliq district, and we were introduced to Fairfax and AGT in terms of coming up with a plan, so that the plan would be long-term, and making sure that regional ownership is key and critical reinvestment continues to happen.

By doing all of that.... It doesn't take long to think big and go big. We have to remember, again, that the assets that were invested into Churchill going back to the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1970s weren't designed for Churchill alone. They were designed for moving agricultural products from the Prairies out to the world: Mexico, Brazil, Europe, Russia, places like that.

Today, we will look that way again. Our strategic partners have the wherewithal.... They're in the industry and will look north.

What's really critical here is that we have the infrastructure. It just needed some attention, and we're getting it that attention. We have a huge runway. In fact, we have two runways, which were designed by the U.S. military going back to the 1940s and 1950s. Those assets serviced the north. What happens is that at times there are duplications. It's hard with infrastructure; if you don't reinvest, it gets tired. Strategically, we have partners and we're prepared to be partners and reinvest in our infrastructure.

I'll tell you that nutrition north is a challenge, with the high cost....

Let's utilize the regions of Canada and use key regions like ours and Tuk so that we can help the regions that we're responsible for.

Mr. Don Rusnak: Thank you for that, Mayor Spence.

I'm going to go to Councillor Jacobson. Do you have a plan like the one Churchill has? Is that something that—

Mr. Merven Gruben: We have it already.

Mr. Don Rusnak: And you're looking for partners to invest. Okay, so there is a plan.

Also, I've been informed that the Minister of Northern Affairs and the Government of the Northwest Territories reached an agreement to review the moratorium two weeks ago. Were you aware of that?

Mr. Merven Gruben: Yes.

Mr. Don Rusnak: A new process is being put in place for consultation and how that's going to go about.

Are you satisfied with having a review of the moratorium?

Mr. Merven Gruben: If we get involved with it, that would be good. Yes.

A voice: And if it's lifted...

Mr. Don Rusnak: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: That's it. That's your time.

Mr. Merven Gruben: Can I answer back here?

The Chair: No, you can't answer Don. Sorry.

I've been trying, but no—

Mr. Don Rusnak: She's trying to cut me off.

The Chair: Hopefully you'll have an opportunity in the next round of questions.

We'll keep going. We're moving to MP Arnold Viersen.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Thanks for being here today. Did you want to respond...? Okay.

I understand that, with Churchill, you're either flying, coming on a ship or taking the rail. There's no road to Churchill.

Tuk got a road recently. Is Churchill looking at that option?

• (1620)

Mr. Michael Spence: Going back, I think it was in 1999 that we were part of a study with the Kivalliq district of Nunavut in terms of looking at a road from the Kivalliq district through Manitoba. We were quite surprised, when the study came to our community, that people wanted to see a road.

I think what's really critical here is that we have a rail line that can be utilized at a lesser cost to operate, so maybe that will be another day.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: It's not a real issue for you.

Mr. Michael Spence: It's not a real issue right now, but it could be in due time.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Yes.

Is there a lot of resource development around Churchill?

Mr. Michael Spence: No, the resource developments are north of us, within the Kivalliq district. The investment that's gone into exploring the Kivalliq district of Nunavut is quite remarkable.

I remember going up there in the 1990s and the early 2000s. Now development is really taking off, and it's great for them.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: In what sector?

Mr. Michael Spence: It's gold mining and diamond mining.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Does the oil play affect Churchill at all? Is there any offshore in Hudson Bay or—

Mr. Michael Spence: No, not that we're aware of. It's strictly minerals just north of us.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I can't imagine that a whole bunch of logging happens up there either.

Mr. Merven Gruben: All the trees are gone.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Arnold Viersen: They burned them all last year.

Mr. Merven Gruben: We've never had any.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: One thing I know, coming from northern Alberta, is that the oil patch and logging, in particular, bring the roads, the Internet, the cell service. Has that been your experience with the oil patch in your area? Have they just demanded that a lot of these things be in place and that, come hell or high water, they're going to have communications and roads and they're going to get their equipment up there somehow?

Mr. Merven Gruben: Yes, they've definitely helped us get things going in the past, but now we're on our own.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: You were saying that there are private ports in Tuk.

Mr. Merven Gruben: Yes.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: What does that look like?

Mr. Merven Gruben: That's actually what we're looking for: some upgrades and help here. There are two private ones, as well as the one that the government owns. And Esso is across the harbour.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Esso has a... Is that what you said?

Mr. Merven Gruben: They're across the harbour, yes, and they're abandoning everything.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: So that's infrastructure that will be obsolete soon.

Mr. Merven Gruben: We want to fix up our community to get ready for... BP and Imperial are going to be coming back. If we fix up our infrastructure and get things ready, then it will be more accessible and easier for the industry to come back and help. It's going to be back; it's just a matter of when.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: My friend across the way is saying that it's the price of oil that's causing the lack of investment in exploration up there.

Mr. Merven Gruben: Yes, it will come back up again.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: There must be other hurdles to bringing the investment up.

Mr. Merven Gruben: Of course, with the environmentalists....

Mr. Arnold Viersen: The environmentalists...?

Mr. Merven Gruben: Yes. People in the States are paying environmental people to come up and raise hell and shut everything down. Basically, that's happening. I've been back and forth to the States, and I know what's going on there.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Do you have any documentation to prove that?

Mr. Merven Gruben: Pretty much. I can email it.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Okay. Interesting.

Mr. Merven Gruben: We have a big meeting.... I've been invited to speak on November 5 in Richmond, B.C., at the National Coalition of Chiefs. They want me to come down and speak on that as well.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Okay.

Is there anything going on with pipeline infrastructure?

Mr. Merven Gruben: Not yet. Hopefully we'll be shipping north from the oil sands to Tuk.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: North?

Mr. Merven Gruben: Yes.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Okay.

Mr. Merven Gruben: It's easier to go up if they don't want to let it go west or east.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Yes, that's true.

Mr. Merven Gruben: It's cheaper for you guys to get it from the Saudis here.

The Chair: That wraps up our time. It's a good place to end.

The questioning now moves to MP Yves Robillard.

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): No, no.

The Chair: No?

Is there anyone else on your side? How about Mike?

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Sure, why not?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I'll take some more time.

• (1625)

Mr. Mike Bossio: Actually, I'll give it to Hunter.

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Nunavut, Ind.): Thanks, Mike and Madam Chair.

I have a couple of things.

Maybe I'll start with you, Mike.

With regard to the support for the Kivalliq hydro and fibre link going north, KIA's David Ningeongan was here last week, appearing before us and pitching the project. You've been around a long time. I know that. We were both a lot younger in Churchill in those days.

The positive economic impact that a project like that would have, not only on the Kivalliq region, but also on Churchill and the communities along the line coming up in Manitoba....

The Chair: You have about two or three minutes.

Mr. Michael Spence: Okay.

Actually, the transmission line comes to our community. That's as far north as it goes. We were part of the Hudson Bay regional round table, when we sat down with the communities north of us and indicated that we needed to look at power transmission, along with fibre optic, going to the Kivalliq district. We've been a big supporter of it.

Basically, I think we're giving back. We're doing our part in terms of supporting what the Kivalliq district wants. Like I said, we have power, but I think it's critically important that, as neighbours, we continue to work together so that we can both benefit. Naturally, we both benefit by coming from the province of Manitoba. A regional partnership is where we're coming from. There's two-way trade, and that's where we'll get our payday. It's critically important that we work together.

Hon. Hunter Tootoo: Thank you.

Maybe I'll just ask my good friend Jackie. I know Larry talked earlier about the effects of climate change. I know some of the challenges of getting stuff by barge from Hay River up to the Arctic Ocean and our communities, including yours, with the low water levels on the Mackenzie River, and a lot of that has to do with climate change.

You're talking about having a port in Tuk and trucking stuff up there and shipping stuff out from there. Do you think that would be a much more reliable solution, with what's happening with the Mackenzie River?

Hon. Jackie Jacobson: Thank you, Hunter.

Yes, it would be. It would be more strategic and more efficient, and there would be cost savings for sure, if you did that. The territorial government has assets there that are more than capable of doing that, too.

The Chair: Thank you.

That wraps up our time. I want to thank you all for travelling so far to give us your views on Arctic policy and infrastructure needs, a snapshot of what's happening in your hometown.

We'll take a short suspension, and then we'll have our second panel for today.

Meegwetch.

• (1625)

(Pause)

• (1635)

The Chair: Welcome, and thank you for coming to our committee.

We have a guest on video conference. Welcome. Thank you for coming into Winnipeg from your community. I know that even that is quite a distance to come in.

We are studying Arctic infrastructure, and you're the second panel. Each of you will have up to 10 minutes to present, and after that we'll go into rounds of questioning from the MPs.

Excuse me?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

I just have a quick motion prior to our panel starting. As you know, we have the Auditor General coming to do two chapters. We've had informal discussions, I believe, about the importance of having officials, both with Indigenous Services and with ESDC, being part of that panel on Wednesday. I would just like to make that a formal motion.

The Chair: That's about calling ESDC to the committee meeting for Wednesday.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: In partnership with the Auditor General's spring report...and to make it televised.

The Chair: T.J., go ahead.

Mr. T.J. Harvey (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Technically, you can't move a motion on a point of order.

The Chair: You are correct, MP Harvey.

MP Viersen, go ahead.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Chair, I would like to move the following motion: that ministry professionals come to the committee with the AG, and that the meeting on Wednesday be televised.

The Chair: All right, that's a valid motion.

MP Harvey, go ahead.

Mr. T.J. Harvey: Madam Chair, I move that the debate on this be now adjourned.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: All right, sorry about that disruption. We had a little bit of committee business.

Madeleine Redfern, mayor of Iqaluit, welcome. We have you up first, I believe.

Ms. Madeleine Redfern (Mayor, City of Iqaluit): Thank you so much to the standing committee for the invitation to come before you.

I just want to say, for the record, that I'm also the president of the Nunavut Association of Municipalities and the vice-chair of the northern forum for the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, as well as a board member of the same organization.

I'm very pleased to come before you to speak about the important issue of infrastructure in our north. I'm sure this committee has heard and knows quite well that there is a deficit of infrastructure in our northern region, especially in Nunavut. There hasn't really ever been a comprehensive northern infrastructure strategy in our north until recently.

There's now one for Nunavut on housing and homelessness, but I'd like to state that, while these regional strategies were done by our territorial government, they did not effectively include the municipalities in the development of that process, even though at that point in time the minister responsible had made the commitment to reach out to our municipalities to provide much-needed data for

their inclusion. As well, the Nunavut Association of Municipalities, unfortunately, was not reached out to and did not participate, either.

Nonetheless, those reports, interestingly enough, do include recommendations that the municipalities, and the Nunavut Association of Municipalities, be responsible for implementing some of those recommendations. Ideally, that's not the way that we develop strategies.

There is no northern energy strategy and no northern telecommunications strategy. While recently northern transportation corridors were announced, they do not include the eastern Arctic.

Most municipalities, of course, are very pleased with the fact that the federal government has committed billions of dollars to infrastructure for this country. Nunavut did sign our integrated bilateral agreement. It provides our region with \$566 million over a period of approximately 10 years. That sounds like a good amount of money, but \$566 million is nowhere near what we require.

The integrated bilateral agreement contains the words "fair balance", which, of course, we tend to interpret at the municipal level as fair share and fair say, we hope, especially as it relates to municipal infrastructure.

You are probably also aware that Canadian municipalities receive approximately 9¢ to 10¢ of the Canadian taxpayer dollar. In the southern portions of Canada, 60% of public infrastructure is in the cities. In Nunavut, this is closer to 100%, because there are no roads, no rail and no transmission lines; therefore, the infrastructure is in our communities.

Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut, is the only community that receives property taxes, whereas the other 24 communities are 100% dependent on the territorial government for their O and M, as well as their capital projects. Iqaluit has approximately 8,000 residents and 1,000 non-residents, who are not residing or considered residents in our community but are nonetheless there. That's primarily because we have the hospital and all the patients coming from the region for medical travel; we have four correctional institutions; the only courthouse; the RCMP headquarters; the largest of the Nunavut Arctic College campuses, which is about to expand almost 100%; the legislative assembly; the majority of Government of Nunavut jobs; and, even with decentralization, we also have the majority of the federal jobs. Yet we have only 2,000 ratepayers. That is not very many to help the municipality with capital projects to build much-needed infrastructure.

● (1640)

We have a budget of approximately \$45 million a year, with 85% coming from property taxes and user fees. Therefore, the Government of Nunavut provides only about 15% grants-in-lieu.

We're very appreciative of the gas tax funding we receive. It's around \$12 million over a period of five years. It is the most flexible. They are the easiest infrastructure dollars we have. The eligibility criteria have recently expanded. We also receive a nominal amount of capital block funding from our territorial government.

We use these funds for our infrastructure projects. Recently, we used them for upgrading our waste-water treatment plant. We received approximately \$19 million from the federal government, out of a \$26-million project. We are receiving \$26 million to close down our dump and open up new sorting and recycling and a new landfill. That is approximately a \$35-million project.

When we had Minister Sohi visit in May 2017, when he was the minister responsible for community infrastructure, we were just opening up our new airport—a gorgeous facility that cost the territorial government about \$300 million. The road to and from that airport was in horrendous condition. Instead of meeting with the minister in my office, I suggested that we do a town tour. In the month of May, I can tell you that the road was in one of the worst conditions ever, so the minister got to experience first-hand how desperately we needed to pave that road, which would have cost only 1% of that \$300 million for the airport.

Part of the problem with a lot of these infrastructure projects that are done by our territorial government, even when they're funded with federal funds, is that a requirement to do a municipal infrastructure assessment—let alone a municipal service assessment—of those projects is not included at this point in time. While we are really appreciative that we're getting a deep-sea port, again, the road to and from the port is inadequate; it's unsafe.

The minister said we can put in a funding application. Ideally, it should be part of that whole infrastructure assessment. It means that the road had to wait. I don't like to use political embarrassment as a tool. It shouldn't be the way we convince our federal or territorial politicians to help.

Similarly, when Minister Garneau came to Iqaluit, as part of the territorial-federal government with that deep-sea port, we ensured that every visiting minister went to the site. None of them had realized that it was next to our dump. One rationale for the new port would be that when tourists come off the cruise ships and enter into our beautiful capital, the first sight they see is not a big pile of waste and garbage. I think that probably helped our business case in getting the funding we needed to ensure that the dump is closed and capped and doesn't look like a dump by the time the deep-sea port opens in 2020.

We also received about \$4 million for our aquatic centre. That is about 10% of what the aquatic centre cost us, unfortunately. At that time, we weren't able to get more assistance from the federal government. They hadn't yet rolled out the big billions of dollars for infrastructure, and our territorial government was only able to help out with approximately \$100,000 of gym equipment. The taxpayers and user fees are paying for that.

• (1645)

I would be remiss if I didn't speak to the fact that climate change is absolutely happening. One of the issues for us is that our pipes are breaking. We've been spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to

repair every pipe, and I can tell you that it is a temporary fix. It is nowhere near what is needed, which would be millions of dollars.

Those are my initial comments, but I'm definitely open to lots of questions, I hope.

Thank you.

The Chair: I am confident you're going to get some.

Moving on to Elder George Kemp from Berens River, a community recently connected by an all-weather road. Welcome, by video conference, to our committee.

You have up to 10 minutes to present.

Mr. George Kemp (Elder, Berens River First Nation, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My name is George Kemp. I'm a former chief from Berens River, 2008-14. During my tenure as chief, I was successful in negotiating an all-weather road into Berens River from the south. I don't know if you guys all got the handout I sent by email, but there's a map there that shows Berens River.

The Chair: George, we have a technical problem. The map you sent is not translated into French so we are unable to distribute it unless we have consensus from all committee members, so that's up to the committee.

Is everyone okay with that? Okay.

Please go on. I'm sorry to interrupt.

Mr. George Kemp: On the sheet that I sent in today, I put all the points. My presentation is on paper, what I'm going to speak about today.

In terms of Manitoba, the highest population of isolated communities is in our northeast region of Manitoba, which you see in the corner of the map here: St. Theresa Point, Garden Hill, Wasagamack, Red Sucker Lake, Manto Sipi, Bunibonabee, Oxford House, and the road leading out to Cross Lake. If you look at the sheet, the population of that area is listed there for all reserves: St. Theresa Point, 4,300; Garden Hill First Nation, 4,800; and the rest of them are listed there.

My point here today is to make the case for connecting the all-weather road from Berens River up to St. Theresa Point as the highest infrastructure need in our area. I present that proposal here today on behalf of Chief Hartley Everett of Berens River and Chief David McDougall of St. Theresa Point. My chief, Hartley Everett, and the chief from St. Theresa Point have a great desire for presenting today as a proposal the red line that you see there going from Berens River up to St. Theresa Point.

Today, 20,000 or 30,000 people live in this isolated corner of Manitoba. It's the highest concentration of first nation communities living in isolation in the 21st century. This population represents the future hub in northern Manitoba. Thompson, Manitoba was the hub at one point, but the mine is shutting down in 2020. The 20,000 people living here are shut off from the outside world.

In my paper, I have a statement from when I was chief. What I say is that isolation kills. By that I mean that the high suicide rates we see in our northern isolated reserves are a result of isolation, poverty, and no hope for the future.

In Berens River, we announced the road project in 2009 and we finished hooking up the road in 2017, and we haven't had a suicide, because the youth of our community were very excited that a road was coming.

The same kind of situation exists here. We're asking the committee to place a high priority on this area. This area is the riding in Canada with the highest child poverty rates. This area has the highest child and family services apprehensions.

Everything hooks back to isolation and poverty. That's what we're looking at here. We're asking you to consider this proposal for a \$400-million road construction project under a hybrid P3 model to construct this piece of road from Berens River to St. Theresa Point. It's 270 kilometres of road.

We're also asking for a connection into Poplar River First Nation. On the map, it's identified as P4. That's 95 kilometres. We're asking for \$140 million for that project.

We have the experience in terms of building the road into Berens River. Both communities have the infrastructure and the capacity for rock blasting, drilling and hauling all the rock to build it. The terrain and the topography are no different in Hollow Water First Nation up to Berens River and to Poplar River, and to St. Theresa Point.

We're looking at setting this up as a project that can be financed through a P3 model and getting the communities involved in shaping the project and so forth. We would like to ask the committee to support us in terms of all the points you see on our map here, and in terms of the bulletin that we've presented here.

• (1650)

We want to say to the people who don't live in isolation today that isolation is worse today than it was 50 years ago in terms of the social impact on our people, because everybody has Internet and everybody has Wi-Fi. Our youth face it in these communities and they feel shut out from the world because they can't access anything. Once you have a highway in place, you can get access to the south and access to hope, hope for a better future. That's what the youth are looking for. In our communities, over 45% of the population is under 45 years of age.

I can't stress enough that, yes, this is a road, but it's also a way out, a way out of a present situation that is intolerable for the people living in northeast Manitoba. This concentrated population will be accessed tremendously by this one route, and you can see the route is directly going south.

You can see a hookup of roads to the north of that, which are basically winter roads. That is to go through Thompson and then down Highway 6. Well, it's 16 hours to go that way right now to Winnipeg, versus going south to Berens River, which is eight hours. The quickest route into Berens River is as you see it, between St. Theresa Point and Berens River, to access south, because the road is already at Berens River.

The road impacts everything in these communities. We've seen positive change in our community, in Berens River, since we've had the road in there. As I said, we have no more suicide problems as we had before, touch wood. Thank God for that. However, we also want to stress that the change our people have seen in getting the road has been tremendous. It has been night and day. The people are happy. They're happy that they have a road now.

The people in Poplar River want a road. They want a road bad, because we're next-door neighbours and they see the benefits of the road to Berens River.

Just on Friday, the provincial government here announced that they're cutting \$2 million from the airport maintenance budgets in all northern communities. There were a chief and council trying to fly into Tadoule Lake, to Barren Lands First Nation. They got there and they had to turn back. They couldn't land because the pilot said there was too much snow on the runway. They turned back and ended up back in Thompson.

We've experienced as first nations in this country that every time we have a PC government in place, we go down to the bottom of the totem pole. We see this as an opportunity for the Liberal government to help our region.

We've put down on our paper here that the cheapest time to build this road is now, with cheap interest rates, with the cheap gas rates, and so forth. If you wait until 30 years from now, the cost of this road will be just tremendous. We're looking at this as an opportunity in time, an opportunity in history for the Liberal government to step in and end this isolation here, because we know and we see as first nation people what goes on in this province when we have a PC government sitting in the provincial legislature. We get nowhere. All we do is face cutbacks.

Right now, there's tremendous concern in the north over cutbacks to airport maintenance. The sale of six airports is up in the air right now in terms of privatization.

These are services that our people depend on. The government is in place to provide services to our people, not to privatize things in the north. That does not make sense in remote communities.

Therefore, we ask you to consider the road proposal as one of the most important things you can do to have an impact on all aspects of our people's lives in this region of Canada.

Thank you.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you so much for your presentation.

We're now going to start the question period from members of Parliament with MP Yves Robillard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their wonderful presentations.

I'll be asking my questions in French.

I was in Nunavut 30 years ago, in 1986 and 1988. I taught for two years in Kuujuaq and Akulivik, so I know a bit about the subject matter.

My questions are for the mayor of Iqaluit.

According to the National Aboriginal Economic Development Board, it is more difficult to build and maintain northern infrastructure because of the environment, the short construction season and other such factors.

How will you adapt to those conditions when the deep-sea port is eventually built in Iqaluit? What could the federal government do to help you on that front?

• (1700)

[English]

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: Thank you to the member for the question.

The deep-sea port in Iqaluit will effectively help reduce the number of days to unload the cargo from the number of ships that we get from early July to approximately the middle or the end of October. It's not a year-round deep-sea port. Quite a number of our territorial or federal politicians did not realize that. We're appreciative of that. It should save the shipping companies approximately \$75,000 a day that they spend when it takes longer to unload. Ideally, we could have, and probably should have, looked at a year-round deep-sea port, which would have required a road. It would have been transformative for not only Iqaluit but the entire region.

Nuuk, which is our sister community in Greenland, has a year-round port. They're able to bring in construction materials, office equipment and goods, and of course food, including perishable food year-round. Then it could have been flown to the smaller communities in our region after that. We're appreciative because it's better than not having the deep-sea port that's going to be coming, but I would like to see that we move away from the smaller investments to the more transformative ones that would make a difference, not just for shortening the days for the unloading of the ships, but actually something that would transform our infrastructure, our services and cost of living for decades and centuries, like what we see in other Arctic nations.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Transportation, energy and telecommunications are three types of infrastructure that are particularly important in the north, so these kinds of infrastructure investments could stimulate economic development.

Iqaluit has limited funding, so how should the federal government prioritize projects to support?

[English]

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: Thank you.

It's really important that we get all the right people into the same room and talk about the short-term, the medium-term and the long-term investment that's required in our infrastructure.

The problem I've seen, including the work I did with the Qikiqtani Truth Commission in doing historical inquiry, is that there have not ever been proper strategies in any particular infrastructure.

As a result, things are very politically driven, in four-year terms, and not always what the communities need. We should have the federal government, the provincial and territorial governments, the municipal governments, indigenous governments, our development corporations—and even those who are interested in the private sector and want to invest in this country and in our nation-building—come and actually do an infrastructure assessment. What exists? What is the age and condition? What is actually needed? Where are the gaps? Then we should have a proper strategy in place, so that we don't see certain things being funded that are not the priorities and we don't just look at one region but at the pan-territorial, pan-northern provincial regions because, as you heard earlier, some projects are inter-regional. Yet, the funding doesn't work that way.

Thank you.

• (1705)

Mr. Yves Robillard: I have only one minute and 34 seconds, so I'll leave it for the next round if you don't mind.

The Chair: Oh, that's kind of revolutionary. I don't know that we do that.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We're moving on to MP Kevin Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Thank you to both of our guests here today.

I was in Iqaluit in February, and it does get very cold there, despite the last person saying it doesn't get to -40°C. It was -53°C for the entire week, so it does.

Anyway, that airport is a game-changer. It is marvellous. Your community, because of the airport, is the gateway to the north now, especially Nunavut. I want to congratulate you on that. At the same time, I did check out the port, or what was to be the port. You've had a few explosions this past summer trying to get it going.

Where are we on that? Many up there do not feel they have been properly consulted about the port, so I want you to talk about that and about the consultations that really have not taken place. Some have, but I read a lot from your newspapers and I understand your community felt a little left out, knowing what the port is going to bring.

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: Thank you.

As I indicated earlier, the first issue is that it's not a year-round port. Second is the issue of the road to and from. Three is how much local employment it's going to provide, or is not providing. Four is that....

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Offshore...?

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: I was just trying to be diplomatic.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Okay. I'll say it then.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: It's the fact that the governments looked at the current users. The port, at its size, is not addressing all the future opportunities, which it could have and should have, so everything, from being able to offload fish, which currently is being done in Greenland—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Greenland and Labrador...

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: —or down in the Canadian Maritimes. Woodward is a company in Labrador that is super keen on potentially providing additional shipping services because they can do it cheaper.

It could have been done better. Again, I think we need to move away from doing things poorly, with poor consultations, not including all the stakeholders, not listening to what people have to say, underinvesting and not looking forward to the future. Those are not big fixes.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: No. Will it open in 2020?

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: That's the goal. The contractor is doing significant daily blastings, working almost 24 hours at this point before the weather hits. I can't predict the future, unfortunately.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I know.

As I said, I spent about eight or nine days up there, and there was a lot of excitement. The telecommunications.... You're absolutely right. There is no northern telecommunications plan. There is no northern energy plan. There is no transportation plan. Your housing is deplorable up there, and it's something that has to be addressed by every government, not just the current one, from what I saw. I went to seven or eight communities. I talked to mining executives. They're pumping in billions of dollars—not millions, billions. Unfortunately.... Well, your airport is seeing it now because they're coming in first from Quebec, landing and then moving forward to Baker Lake or wherever.

I should move on, because we also have another guest. Elder Kemp, your website is very nice. I've been looking at it. The road looks fantastic. I see it was \$200 million. That certainly has opened up your area.

I don't see a lot of jobs or employment opportunities. The last one on the website here is from September 7, 2018, although I see that you're really trying to get your young people engaged in finishing school. I want to compliment you on that, but you have to get job opportunities in that area, as you said. There are 20,000 or 30,000 people who are in isolation, and when you're bored, you get into trouble.

Maybe you could just talk about the infrastructure. You mentioned that the Internet is barely available, if at all, and that's part of this report.

I sat on the heritage committee before I came here. We tried to get every community connected by 2020. I know it won't happen, definitely not up north, but how about your area? Is there a chance with this road that we're actually going to see some telecommunica-

tions companies there? Now that Bell Media has taken over MTS—they bought it a year and a half ago—is there a chance that they're going to service your area?

• (1710)

Mr. George Kemp: Thank you, Mr. Waugh.

Yes. When the road was constructed into Berens River, fibre optic cable was laid in the road as well. Our chief and council have been in contact with Bell Media, and they are looking at providing services into Berens River next summer.

I understand there's also a first nations company, Clear Sky Connections, that's looking at this whole issue in terms of a province-wide initiative. I guess you could say there's competition in Berens River. When I was chief, Bell Media told us we had to pay for all the equipment put up on a tower in order to get cell service. They're not saying that anymore, but I guess they see a threat coming as well, so competition is good.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Let's hope that when they did buy MTS that was part of the agreement, to service rural Manitoba.

I'm running out of time. I want to ask you a question about your bridge replacement meeting on April 3. You talked about the roads and so on that you need, but what about this bridge? There seems to be a lot of consultation and a lot of.... Well, you can fill us in on the bridge replacement.

Mr. George Kemp: Okay. Regarding the bridge, the road opened last year into Berens River. I believe it was December 6 when they made the official announcement that the road was open. We still have the bridge at Berens River to cross to the north side. The north side is where 75% of the people live and where all the businesses exist. The bridge we have was put in there in 1982. It's an old railway bridge that we bought from Saskatchewan and put in there ourselves.

It's very narrow. It has a canopy on top. Semi-trailers can't fit through the canopy because, being an old railway bridge, it's all girders on top. The new bridge is slated to go out for tender this winter, with construction starting next spring.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: What's the cost?

Mr. George Kemp: I believe it's around the \$15-million mark.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Okay. Who pays that?

Mr. George Kemp: It's being done through Indigenous Services Canada.

The Chair: MP Waugh, you're out of time.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: He's pushing his limits there.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I'm trying.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Yves gave it to him.

The Chair: Okay.

We're moving on to MP Niki Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you very much to our witnesses today. Mayor Redfern, thank you for your presentation. Elder Kemp, thank you for joining us here today to talk about your work, both the work that you've done for many years and the work that needs to be done going forward, and for your clear recommendations to our committee. I certainly appreciate that.

As somebody who's been on the winter road to Berens River many times, I can only imagine what a huge difference the new all-weather road has made. I certainly appreciate the various points you raised, and most importantly, the question of life and death, as you pointed out. Nobody can deny that when you hear something like, "There have been no suicides since the road was open or even leading up to its opening", I think it's very clear why we need to be building all-weather roads in northeastern Manitoba.

I'm wondering if you might also reflect on how critical it is to build this all-weather road system when it comes to issues like forest fires. This summer, we dealt of course with the very stressful situation in Little Grand Rapids, another community that was supposed to be part of the all-weather road system, where people were truly abandoned until the last minute, when the army was finally able to come in. It was made very clear to me by the leadership that if there had been an all-weather road, people could have left in their own time. Obviously, we'd still need an emergency evacuation plan, but access to a road would have made a big difference.

I think these are realities that anybody living in an urban centre or a rural community that's connected by road cannot understand.

Could you speak a bit to how it would make a difference on that front as well?

• (1715)

Mr. George Kemp: Thank you, Niki.

You saw what happened last year when Wasagamack had to be evacuated. They didn't even have a road connecting their community to the airport. The airport up there is built on an island. In the middle of the night they had to evacuate out of the airport by St. Theresa Point. In emergencies, all-weather roads go a long way in helping reduce the impact and the need to use air traffic and airlifts and so forth. It's not only to get people out. As you saw at Little Grand Rapids, once a fire does occur and damages a community like that, how do you get hydro crews in there? How do you get 1,200 fridges and stoves back in there that were spoiled because they sat with food that rotted in them? A whole bunch of other impacts come to light after the fire as well. Those are the kinds of things that go on.

Looking at our region north of Berens River and the Island Lake area in terms of airlifts, back in 1997, when the winter roads failed because of climate change, a huge airlift was needed to get the food supplies and the fuel and so forth in there. Every year that risk increases. We haven't had anything nearly like 1997 recently, but the day is coming when we won't get winter roads in.

Also, nowadays you can't trust ice. We make our winter roads across many lakes and rivers. An environmental disaster is waiting to happen when tanker trucks start going through the ice and into our rivers and lakes.

All-weather roads impact in many different ways that people don't normally think of because they don't live there. They don't understand all the things that go on in our communities because we are isolated. Two days ago, a 15-year-old committed suicide in St. Theresa Point. That goes on quietly. You don't hear about it, but when you look at the suicide stats in Manitoba and the rest of Canada, we have the highest; there's no question about that. You look at the stats in child and family services, and in the Churchill—Keewatinook riding they are the highest in Canada. There's a reason for that.

This whole idea that we have modern facilities and Internet, asking when we're going to get Internet and so forth.... That's all fine and dandy, but all it does is make our young people wish for more, wish for a better life. And you can't do that living in isolation. You can't provide any economic opportunities. We got the road at Berens last year, and now we have a chance to work on different things, our commercial fishing industry, our forestry industry. There's a new UNESCO world heritage park in place in our area.

Poplar River doesn't even have a road. In 2016, the environmental licence was issued for the road from Berens River to Pop River. When the PC government got in, they shut it down. Everything is approved. That's a shovel-ready project to go from Berens River to Pop River. The people in Pop River are asking when they are going to get hooked up to the road. By the looks of things, if we don't do something now with a government friendlier to first nations, I can't see that road to Pop River happening in the next 30 to 40 years. I can't, not with the climate right now in Manitoba.

We have a government here that said they had a billion-dollar deficit. The auditor just came out and said it was only \$345 million. Yes, it's a debt, but the whole idea of "cut, cut, cut" is being borne by our communities up north now. The whole East Side Road project was shut down. Two months ago, we had a big announcement out of Red Sucker Lake, which is just north. On the map, you see Red Sucker Lake. There's a gold discovery and exploration project going on there now. They're estimating there's over \$4 billion worth of gold there.

• (1720)

Every time we've seen development of all-weather roads and so forth, it's always about extracting the resources. What about us as people? We're there. Look at us. There are 20,000 people in one concentrated area who are suffering. There's no need for that. Let's end that type of thinking in this country today.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Elder Kemp.

The Chair: Thank you, Niki.

We're moving on to MP Will Amos.

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you to both of our witnesses. I'm sorry I wasn't able to take part in the presentations, but I feel fortunate in a sense because last year I had the opportunity for the first time to visit Iqaluit and to go around the east side of the island.

Way back, 20 years ago, I had an opportunity to meet the chief of Poplar River, Chief Louie back in the day, and paddle down the Bloodvein River with him. We flew out of Poplar River after visiting the communities, so I know exactly what you're referring to when you talk about that sense of isolation.

I'd like to ask both of you a similar question. We know that there is a long list of top priorities for infrastructure investment, whether it's roads, digital infrastructure or ports. The list is very long, and the available funds will never be sufficient to cover that long list.

I'd like to hear more about how your communities go about the exercise of prioritizing the top three or the top four in this context of northern infrastructure. How do you get to "It has to be A, B and C"? How can our government do a better job of appreciating that prioritization process?

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: Thank you.

For the municipality, I would have to say that our water infrastructure is a priority, as well as ensuring that we address climate change issues with respect to permafrost and the breaking of pipes.

For our capital city—which we happen to be—I would prioritize telecommunications and the fibre optic line between Iqaluit and Nuuk. We consume 70% to 75% of the broadband for the entire territory, even though we're only one of 25 communities and we have 25% of the population. It's getting to the point where you can't run any level of government, organization or business with the state of telecommunications, even with the nominal increase that we just got with the boost of funding. It's still satellite.

The other one, I would say, for a capital city, is energy. We need affordable, stable energy. With De Beers recently buying the mine near us, there's an opportunity for us to find an energy solution. It's not going to be wind, and it's not going to be solar. That's the reality in our area. It might be hydro or it might be SMR, small modular reactors. We need to look at that.

The last one, I would say, which would be beneficial for the entire region, is a university. We need to develop that capacity, the human capacity. We need people who have that education to be able to run our government and to fulfill their obligations in the government as senior management or middle management. A tremendous amount of Arctic research is done, but not because we have a northern university. It's done in southern universities in Alberta, Manitoba or Ontario. As a result, I would have to say that some of it is not always the best research that it could be and should be.

It's a huge economic factor, but it also develops a really important civil society, a civic-minded society. People are much more inclined to care about the different levels of government and democracy, and to participate. Can you imagine what your regions—Ontario, Manitoba or Quebec—would look like without a university? Just imagine the state of governance, the state of business, the state of innovation, the state of everything. That's what we find ourselves,

that without a northern university, we are not going to address that really important investment in the people.

● (1725)

Mr. William Amos: Elder Kemp, do you want to provide an answer on that issue?

Mr. George Kemp: Yes. Thank you, Honourable Amos.

In our area in the northeast section of Manitoba, we look at all-weather road access ending isolation as a top priority for our region. Everything else you want to do in terms of improving, upgrading, rebuilding, or building new infrastructure is hooked to access. We have only fly-in communities north of us now. When you go to build new schools, when you go to do sewer and water projects and all those kinds of things, you're tied to a 30- or 40-day window of a winter road. Everything is tripled in cost when it comes to a winter road, whether it be construction costs or delays. In the first nation communities that are isolated in northern Manitoba, we can't help but get into cost overruns with every project we do.

These things present tremendous burdens on our first nation chiefs and councils, because you're always behind the eight ball. When you take on a big project, which you don't want to say no to—you know you need the infrastructure—you can't help but go in the hole on all these projects because of isolation. There is no proper road to get stuff in there.

There's a lot of waste. A lot of concrete that is shipped up north from Winnipeg comes in big, round concrete bags, three or four feet around and three or four feet high. We have no storage up north, and concrete is humidity-sensitive. It comes in on a winter road in March and gets dumped on the ground, because we have no infrastructure for warehousing or humidity or that kind of stuff. By the time you're ready to build in May, when the frost is out of the ground, those things are all hard. Then you wait until next year to get another shipment in.

On and on it goes. All of these things are tremendously wasteful in terms of trying to do infrastructure in the north. Without access, we can't build properly. That's why I say that roads are number one. The next priority is in terms of our communities—our community roads, sewer and water, and infrastructure like that. We need access.

Mr. William Amos: *Meegwetch.*

The Chair: Thank you.

Meegwetch to both of you for coming out and participating today. I know that the session was short and there's still so much more to do. This report will collect evidence from the presenters. We will submit that report to the House of Commons, and then it will be available to all Canadians.

Thank you so much for participating. All the best.

The meeting is adjourned.

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