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Chair

The Honourable MaryAnn Mihychuk

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• (0850)

[English]

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

We're at the indigenous and northern affairs committee, on a lovely spring day. You can feel it outside, that it will turn. I think it's actually warmer back home in the west than it is here.

Before we start, I want to recognize that Canada is in a process of truth and reconciliation. It's very important for us to think about that, especially in our committee, but also for all of government, and the fact that we're on the unceded territory of the Algonquin people here in Ottawa.

I want to thank the guests for coming. We are in the process of hearing witnesses in a study on community capacity, on the ability to get an education, on training and on job opportunities. We're very anxious to hear from our witnesses. The diversity of opportunities often depends on your ability for economic development, for access to your reserves or coming into the city.

The committee will, I'm sure, ask you many relevant questions, and you have the opportunity to present for up to 10 minutes.

I see that we have two groups. We have the National Aboriginal Lands Managers Association....

You may have us all to yourselves, because so far Ontario First Nations has not arrived; but they may.

Let's get started. You have 10 minutes, and then we'll get into the question period.

It's over to you.

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty (Director, National Aboriginal Lands Managers Association): Thank you very much, Madame.

My name is Theodore John Merasty. I am from the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation, in northeastern Saskatchewan. Our territory encompasses 32,000 square kilometres, eight communities, and over 11,000 band members, and it is a vast untapped territory. It's been tapped a little bit but not as much as it could be.

Good morning. I am a land manager and I am also on the board of directors for the National Aboriginal Lands Managers Association, NALMA. I'm also the chair of the Saskatchewan Aboriginal Lands Technicians, SALT, which I've been with for a number of years. I'm here today with my colleague Albert Marshall Jr. from the east to

speak on behalf of our associations, specifically with regard to community capacity-building and the retention of talent in the delivery of essential services on reserve lands.

I'm going to say a few words in my first language.

[Witness spoke in Cree]

[English]

We would like to thank the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs for the invitation to speak today. We look upon this opportunity to promote awareness of raising professional standards in first nation land management and to draw attention to the need to build capacity in first nations across the country.

The National Aboriginal Lands Managers Association was officially formed in 2000 as a not-for-profit, non-political organization. NALMA is a technical organization driven by first nations land management professionals across Canada. Our association is composed of eight regional lands associations with 195 first nations and Inuit communities represented, namely in the regions of Atlantic Canada, Quebec and Labrador, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Nunavut and British Columbia.

Our members operate under various land programs or regimes. The RLEMP program is the reserve land and environment management program, which manages reserves under the Indian Act. The second one is the Framework Agreement on First Nation Land Management, which is managing lands under a sectoral self-government arrangement. Third is self-government for full control of administration, land and resources.

NALMA and our regional lands associations work towards providing opportunities in professional development, networking and technical support that will meet the existing, emerging and future needs of first nations land managers to efficiently and effectively manage their lands.

In the 2017-18 fiscal year, NALMA provided land management training to 800 first nations participants. In addition, we engaged and provided technical support to approximately 2,000. For more information regarding our association, visit nalma.ca and coemrp.ca.

A central pillar of NALMA's mandate is to raise professional standards and promote a code of ethics among practitioners in the field of land management on reserve. As the national certifying body for professional lands managers working on reserves across the country, NALMA holds expertise in the development and retention of professional capacity in first nations. Since the inception of our professional lands management certification program, NALMA has graduated 175 certified land managers across the country. There were only a couple in Alberta.

With respect to retention of professional capacity, NALMA has observed a number of challenges for indigenous nations. Not surprisingly, one of the central issues is a lack of funding to retain qualified staff. Oftentimes, what the nation can afford in compensation is substantially less than what a person with equivalent qualifications could earn off reserve. In the field of land management, we have seen certified land managers leave their home community to work for another first nation or government or industry. There are multiple elements that contribute to the decision to relocate, and without a doubt, compensation is one of them.

Other obstacles to retention can include unrealistic expectations about the workload of the individual and job descriptions that include too many disparate responsibilities. As well, there is the lack of job security or a secure funding source for long-term positions, and the need for more trained staff—for example, more than one qualified person working in that capacity. Peter Ballantyne is a large band, one of the largest in western Canada, and I'm the only land manager in the whole department, as an example. There is also wage stagnation, lack of support from leadership, and difficulty in accessing training close to home, which can be a barrier to career growth, especially for women.

• (0855)

[Witness spoke in Cree]

Mr. Albert Marshall Jr. (Director, National Aboriginal Lands Managers Association): Thank you.

Good morning, everyone. My name is Albert Marshall Jr. I am from the Eskasoni First Nation in Nova Scotia, Mi'kmaq territory. I'm also a board member for the National Aboriginal Lands Managers Association, and I am the chair for the Atlantic Region Aboriginal Lands Association, ARALA, in the Atlantic.

I'd like to say a few words in Mi'kmaq too.

[Witness spoke in Mi'kmaq]

[English]

I would like to honour and acknowledge the ancestral lands of the Algonquin peoples. We ask the Creator and the spirit of our ancestors to grant us wisdom and speak for the benefit of our peoples.

Managing reserve land can be very complicated and demanding. Working under the legal framework of the Indian Act or sectoral self-government land codes requires specialized knowledge and skills. Typically, a land manager is responsible for managing the lands, environment and natural resources. This can be very challenging and overwhelming for staff who do not have sufficient support and training.

In the 2017-18 fiscal year, NALMA, in partnership with Indigenous Services Canada, conducted 15 national engagement sessions involving 300 first nation representatives with respect to the reserve land and environment management program, RLEMP, and the Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act, FHRMIRA.

A common theme that surfaced in all the engagement sessions was the need for stable, multi-year funding to support core staff at appropriate salary levels equivalent with the public service of Canada. The need for professional development and capacity was another key area of consideration. Final reports of the engagement sessions can be found on the ISC website.

We find ourselves at an unprecedented time in Canadian history, where indigenous nations are being affirmed as governments in their own right and the nation-to-nation relationship between the Crown and indigenous nations is being actively cultivated. As part of this relationship-building process, it is imperative for the Canadian government to recognize and support the needs and to contribute to first nation success in reaching greater autonomy.

Thank you again for the invitation to speak.

Wela'liog.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to start the questioning period with MP Yves Robillard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): I thank the witnesses for their statements.

Several classes have now graduated from the Professional Land Management Certification Program. Have you had any feedback from the graduates about this training and its usefulness in the communities?

• (0900)

[English]

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: The answer is yes. I am a product of the professional land management certification program. I also took the indigenous peoples resource management program out of the University of Saskatchewan. I also went to the integrated resource management program 25 years ago through SIAST, which is now called Saskatchewan Polytechnic.

In terms of going out to get training and then coming back to serve our communities, that is exactly what we did.

Mr. Albert Marshall Jr.: Just to add to that, yes, people have come back to the course. Given that some people's dynamics change—some people go off sick or something—they have the opportunity to come back to finish their course.

To add to what Ted said, yes, it's very beneficial to our communities when you have well-trained staff.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Your training program seems essential to the development of community capacity, and particularly to the autonomy of communities.

In your opinion, would it be beneficial to broaden this program so that it can benefit more people? How could access to the program be facilitated?

[English]

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: It is absolutely imperative that we expand the program. Not to impugn Indigenous Services Canada, but in past years they have funded only one land manager per first nation. As you well know, if you have a school in your community and you have only one teacher, it doesn't bode well for the community. You need more educated people; you need more land managers.

In my community, I definitely need three or four more land managers to manage four to five reserves and almost 100,000 acres of land: agricultural, leased and commercially designated lands.

It's absolutely imperative that the program be expanded, because what's good for first nations is also good for Canada.

Mr. Albert Marshall Jr.: Thank you, Ted.

Just to add to that, we also added a couple more universities to our schedule: Victoria, B.C., and Algoma University, here in Ontario. We're trying to reach out to our western colleagues to make training more accessible for them, and also to individuals who are in the east.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Are there other programs whose objective is to improve community capacity, which you have not yet been able to implement? How can the federal government contribute to their implementation?

[English]

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: Speaking only for my community, I am five hours north of Saskatoon in Saskatchewan, so accessing educational institutes was a big factor in my having to leave my community to go out to get an education.

Also, I come from a family of 11 brothers and sisters, all of whom had to leave their reserve to go out to get an education, and most of them haven't come back because there are not enough jobs in the communities and there are just not enough resources within each first nation to retain a lot of the people who go out and get an education.

A lot of us would like to go back and serve our communities, right in our home communities, but because where I am in Prince Albert is a centralized location, and I have to be where the position is.

Also, with regard to the lack of resources available to a lot of reserve communities, a lot of them would succeed more if there were, for example, more university education courses or even trade schools within our communities. For example, Pelican Narrows is a community of over 3,000 people, but there is only high school there.

Sometimes we have programs that come in from time to time, but there's nothing solid, concrete, and nothing long-term like a two-year

diploma program or a four-year college education. We all have to leave for that.

If you think maybe it's easy to leave, I would just ask if any one of you would go to one of our reserves for four years to go to school. The culture shock would be quite a bit different and stark.

I think it is very important that we expand education in all communities going forward. The more educated a population you have, the better it is for everybody.

I just want to throw this out there. I know that oftentimes dollars are a factor in educating people, but think about it this way. If you provide four years of university education to any one person, the Government of Canada gets back over 40 years of a tax-paying, productive member of society, so that's a good investment, not just in first nations but in all of Canada.

Thank you.

• (0905)

The Chair: Monsieur Robillard, you have about one minute.

Mr. Yves Robillard: That's it.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have with us Melanie Debassige from the Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation. Does the committee wish to suspend the question period to allow an opening statement? Is that fine?

Melanie, welcome. Would you like to present something to the committee? Then we'll go on to MP McLeod.

Ms. Melanie Debassige (Executive Director, Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation): First of all, thank you.

I would like to begin by acknowledging, again, the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabeg people. I also want to thank the committee for the opportunity to participate in this study pertaining to community capacity development and the retention of talent in the delivery of essential services on reserve.

My name is Melanie Debassige and I'm from M'Chigeeng First Nation. I'm the executive director at the Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation. The OFNTSC has been around for 25 years, and I am the first indigenous female they've hired in this 25-year period. The organization is very proud of that.

The OFNTSC welcomes the opportunity to contribute. We were mandated by the Ontario first nations' chiefs in assembly in 1992-93. We're the largest technical advisory services organization here in Ontario. We provide technical advisory services in the areas of capital project planning, development, quality assurance, training and operations, fire protection, architectural support services, housing inspections and the housing program. Our underlying objectives are fostering greater first nation autonomy and the acquisition of capital facilities and infrastructure and development. We also promote the development of modern community health and safety practices.

The OFNTSC envisions self-sufficient and sustainable first nations capacity to deliver self-reliant technical services for future generations. As we move forward, OFNTSC is building on our engagement capacity to work effectively with the indigenous communities we service and to advance reconciliations, informed and guided by the TRC calls to action.

OFNTSC is working with all staff to provide cultural support. One of the things we like to pride ourselves on is that we are a first nations organization but we cannot just be a first nations organization. We also have to bring those practices in and learn about our people at the same time from things that we've lost over the last 150 years.

OFNTSC will continue to rely on the advice and support of indigenous people to improve our hiring and retention strategies. We will better incorporate the advice and support of elders and seek to increase indigenous representation in our leadership and governance structures.

OFNTSC continually seeks ways to connect, receive feedback and exchange information with the indigenous people we work with. We are committed to trying new things and working closely with our people to innovate, adapt and adopt best practices. Ideally, we will be part of a made-in-Canada effort to design and demonstrate these best practices.

Our work with indigenous engagement is ongoing, and it's a long-term effort, but we are not there yet. We still strive and we will keep working hard to advance reconciliation with indigenous people within OFNTSC's mandate by investing in meaningful and enduring relationships with the people we work with.

Thank you again for hearing from OFNTSC today.

Meegwetch.

● (0910)

The Chair: *Meegwetch.*

MP Cathy McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

One area that I've heard a number of communities talk about, and I don't think it was touched on in your presentation, is the whole issue of the land registry. I'm not sure who would be the best person to answer this particular question. Maybe it would be Mr. Marshall.

How do you perceive the issue of a land registry? Does it overlap into your area at all?

Mr. Albert Marshall Jr.: The land registry... That's a good question, given the fact that there are different land regimes throughout Canada, some under RLEMP, as we mentioned, and some under sectoral self-government and FNLM. Land registry needs to be looked into and revamped, because what I've heard from membership is that they're having problems in making entries into land transactions. I'm not quite sure who is taking care of this.

Would you know, Ted?

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: Indigenous Services Canada runs the Indian lands registry.

The registry was revamped a couple of years back, but only because of the need for more privacy. It used to be open to the public. Anybody in Canada could look into that registry and find out what was happening on reserve lands, whether permits were being given or whether things were happening on those particular parcels of reserve land, so there was a privacy issue. It has since been changed, and now only first nations and their land managers, or somebody responsible from the first nation, can access the lands registry.

Everything can use improvement. With regard to where it's at now, I think it's working as intended.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Is it fairly responsive in terms of timeliness? I've heard concerns that it takes way too long in terms of being able to do things in a timely way.

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: I don't mean to be offensive, but it's a government program, so things tend to move like molasses on a cold day.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I know the systems that are in place for provinces can move at the speed of business. I've heard that there's a real challenge in terms of both registry and leasing issues. I don't know if we have anyone coming specifically to talk about that issue, but I think it's important. It is certainly a capacity thing in terms of communities being able to do the things they want to do in a timely way. I'm not sure if our witness list includes something on that.

Could you give me a job description of your lands managers, the scope and the role?

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: Albert's is probably different in many respects from mine.

With regard to mine, back home I manage commercial properties, agricultural properties. We lease out land to farmers and hayers. We also lease properties to Saskatchewan indigenous communities, other first nations and individuals. We have lots and blocks in our communities that we've converted to reserve status and that we lease out to homeowners. Everything that has to do with lands goes through us. Rarely does anything that's happening within our own reserves escape our attention.

Imagine if Ottawa had a department that had one person responsible for all the properties in Ottawa. It would need a big department with a lot of staff.

With regard to your question, yes, there's nothing that happens back home that we don't have a say in or at least take a glance at.

● (0915)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I know you talked about support. Do any of them do cost recovery in terms of properties getting leased out for some kind of business venture so that there is some own-source revenue that goes back into the community and supports the work that's being done?

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: Again, I'm speaking for myself only. I get funding from Indigenous Services Canada to the tune of \$52,000 a year because I'm in the reserve lands and environment management program, the RLEMP. But my first nation contributes over \$100,000 to my office budget from own-source revenues, and a lot of those own-source revenues are from leasing—business developments and what have you. In terms of my whole budget, more than two-thirds comes from within my own first nation.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: You talked about the three different types of regimes. As a land manager, can you compare and contrast some of the positives and negatives of the three regimes?

Mr. Albert Marshall Jr.: With regard to the positives and negatives of the three land regimes, my first nation is under the reserve lands and environment management program, the RLEMP. For us—I can't speak for any regime other than this one—it's very challenging when it comes to doing business on reserve when you're under the act. But it's not impossible. We have great support, especially through NALMA. It doesn't matter which land regime you're in, we're always helping each other regardless of the situation.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you.

The Chair: I'm sorry. We have run out of time on that question period.

We move on to MP Rachel Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Hello, everyone. Thank you so much for speaking with us today. Thank you so much for your presentations.

One of my first questions goes to the two of you. You said that the program has graduated 175 certified land managers across the country. I know a lot of indigenous communities are rural and remote, and sometimes getting the training to those communities can be a real challenge.

Can you talk about the models you have used, and how you have partnered? You said you were in Victoria. I'm curious about how you're working with indigenous communities to make sure those folks get trained.

Mr. Albert Marshall Jr.: When you're a member of NALMA, you get notification of training opportunities and network opportunities.

As I said, NALMA has partnered with Algoma and Victoria, but we're also looking into possibly partnering with Cape Breton University.

When it comes to training and opportunities like that, if somebody is not a member of our association, and if I know they are a land manager, or in that field, I reach out to them and tell them we're here to offer support and networking and training opportunities for members and non-members.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

It was also mentioned in the testimonies that one of the challenges is accessing training close to home, which can be a barrier to career growth, especially for women.

I would like some clarity about those barriers specifically for women.

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: I think a lot of it has to do with young families, children at home. As we all know, if you have children and you don't have a decent income, it's hard to get help. If you don't have a big family, it's hard to get help.

With regard to training and education, you're leaving home for extended periods of time, and it impacts not only the mother and child situation, but the family dynamic as well, because as we all know, especially with young families, to be away from your children for an extended period of time to go to a training program is not a healthy thing. You want to be home, and you want to be nurturing and raising your children on a daily basis, as opposed to a part-time basis.

● (0920)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you so much.

All of you talked a lot about capacity-building and looking at the challenges you're facing in terms of autonomy. I think that's important to talk about, especially when you talk about the revenue. Earlier, you talked about your department and your community putting two-thirds of the revenue into it.

Can all three of you talk about what sort of capacity-building you need in communities and those specific challenges? What do you think the federal government could assist with in opening some of those opportunities and doors for communities?

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: With regard to capacity-building, I will go back to what I said earlier about the fact that only one first nations land manager is funded per community. If you expanded on that, not only would you have the capacity, but you would have—

People like to have variety in their lives. Being a land manager is a great position. It's a good job, but we can't expect people to be there for 20, 25 or 30 years. Often people have 10 careers in a lifetime.

For example, I've been a land manager for my first nation for seven years. Hopefully, I'm in a position now where I can bring somebody on board to train and get them into the programs—to pass the professional land management certification program and the indigenous peoples' resource management program—so they could be certified land managers and I could be gone in three years to do something else.

This is one of six careers I've had myself, and I'm ready to move on. I'm not saying it hasn't been a good seven years. I just think it's time for somebody younger to take over that responsibility. Also, we need those additional resources to train and educate the next generation of land managers.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Melanie, do you want to add anything?

Ms. Melanie Debassige: The field that I work in is very specific. We're looking for people with specific technical backgrounds. Most of the time we're looking for engineers or people who are in the water operator industry.

The difficulty we have is that there aren't a lot of internship or cooperative programs to foster indigenous students to go to school, and then also to support them while they're doing their hours working toward their P.Eng. A lot of them have young families to support, but at the same time they want to have a professional career. The people who go into these professional careers are going to go back into their communities. They're going to work. They're going to provide services. They're going to be building water treatment centres, building infrastructure—schools, roads. They're going to be providing oversight on all of those projects.

I feel that's one of the biggest challenges we have, the lack of continued support throughout that process. Through the funding that we get through Indigenous Services Canada, we do the best we can to spread that money so that we can support youth programs. At the same time, we have to take one piece from here so that we can deliver over here, and there is not a lot of wiggle room.

That's one of the largest challenges we have, to get people into those technical careers. Becoming an engineer is not an easy task. It takes a lot of dedication, a lot of hard work, and it takes the support of a community to do that.

Within OFNTSC, we provide a scholarship and bursaries to first nation students, but how far will \$2,500 go? You can't stretch that dollar too far. I find that in the role I'm in right now, that's one of the biggest challenges.

We all know what the water crisis is here in Ontario. OFNTSC prides itself on removing boil water advisories. We removed one last week from Windigo First Nation. We do that work and we pride ourselves.... That's what we build the organization on, that we can deliver these services.

Again, we have people who are retiring, and we don't have people moving into those fields of work because they are very technically advanced. You have to have a specific skill set to do that work. You can't just put somebody into that kind of work, because it's not only scientific, but also technical.

• (0925)

The Chair: I'm fortunate to have a bit of time to ask you some questions.

I would like to explore your comments about women and their ability to become land managers. Let's get down to the numbers. How many land managers are female—what percentage?

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: I can't answer that, but in terms of when we were going to school, most in the classroom were women, in the professional land management certification program.

With regard to our Saskatchewan aboriginal land technicians, I'd say it's quite even, at about 50%. The people who come to our conferences and to our community gatherings or meetings or what have you, a lot of them are women.

The Chair: So 50% of land managers on reserves are women.

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: I can't give you that specific absolute number.

The Chair: Approximately.

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: That's from what I've seen in Saskatchewan. I can't speak for the whole country.

The Chair: I think that's pretty commendable. You're beating Canada's average.

You also mentioned the obligations for family and children. If a person wants to be a land manager, what kind of child support or wraparound services are available?

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: There are none. You basically leave your community. You go out, get an education, or go get the training for a few weeks, or however long it takes, and then you come back.

In my case, I had to leave my child behind to go out and then come back. It's a good thing he recognized me when I came back.

The Chair: Is that a satisfactory system, or would you like to see additional wraparound services?

We're doing a report and we're trying to identify barriers. I'm not saying that we're able to provide it, but at least we'd know what the most significant problems are.

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: With regard to NALMA, their funding is strictly geared towards students going out to get an education, to get that training. They pay for their going there and back and for hotels, rooms, meals and what have you. Their training sessions are held all over the country.

For example, there might be a program happening on the east coast or in B.C. or in all parts in between. Let's say there's a training program happening in Saskatoon. Anybody from Saskatchewan can go to that. It's close, basically. It's home. It's in their backyard, but for somebody coming in from Quebec or B.C., it's quite a stretch to get there, even though it's for a short period of time. The training programs aren't that long. Oftentimes, they're a couple of weeks long, but still, it's a couple of weeks of the child care services that are provided and whatnot.

The Chair: That's right.

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: If they were provided right in their home community, maybe that would be different, but then you're not going to have 25 students from the same community taking the same training program, because there are just not going to be 25 jobs for them when they're done.

The Chair: When you look at land managers, for those communities that are remote, with no road access, how many managers are indigenous? Do we still have to bring people up from the south?

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: With regard to Saskatchewan aboriginal lands technicians, we had a conference just a couple of weeks ago in Saskatoon. We invited all 74 first nations: land managers, technicians, chiefs, councillors and anybody involved with lands and resources in their communities. All of them, every one of them, were first nations people. The only non-indigenous folks we saw were from Indigenous Services Canada.

The Chair: That's great.

Tell me what your graduation rate is in Saskatchewan on reserves.

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: If memory serves me, it's at 67%, I believe. It's less than the dominant society number, but it's a lot better than it was when I graduated from high school in 1988. I was one of six high school graduates in my whole community. Nowadays, if you go back to Pelican Narrows, you'll see 25 or 30 graduates come June. We've had as many as 40 in certain years. Yes, the graduation rates are improving. They could still be better.

● (0930)

The Chair: Melanie, can I ask how many courses of math and physics there are on reserves in northern Ontario? Those are courses that are fundamental to becoming an engineer.

Ms. Melanie Debassige: Personally, I know of only one high school on reserve, and I don't believe it's funded as a high school. It's on the Wikwemikong unceded Indian reserve that's located on Manitoulin Island. I believe they do have some fundamental programs in math and physics.

But again, with the way the school system is set up, your high school is pretty well predetermined before you even get in the front door when you're embarking on your high school journey. Most of the children in Ontario are sent off reserve for high school. Not only are they dealing with their educational journey, but they also have to deal with culture shock and racism. They have to deal with a number of things.

They have access to the same programs that every other Canadian has access to, but do they have that same opportunity? I do not believe so.

The Chair: The high school where kids would have to go is a long way from a place such as Pikangikum or up at James Bay.

Ms. Melanie Debassige: Yes.

The Chair: It's over a thousand kilometres or more to get to high school.

Ms. Melanie Debassige: Yes, and from what I understand, at one of the high schools—I believe it was in Attawapiskat—students would have to change classes and walk through the -30°C or -40°C weather to different trailers to change classes. It wasn't a great environment for them to be in. Also, I believe there was a fuel spill in the school. I don't know if it was cleaned up.

The Chair: It's very difficult.

How many females—what percentage—are in your program?

Ms. Melanie Debassige: In my program? Do you mean through the Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Melanie Debassige: We have one female indigenous engineer working for us right now, but we have two female engineers working on our team.

Engineers are hard to recruit, but it's also difficult to get them to understand the differences working with the first nations community and the protocols that come in place depending on the community you're entering. Some are patrilineal; some are matrilineal. It's understanding the communities, but the numbers aren't very high in having indigenous females in the technical services careers.

The Chair: I would imagine there are very few.

I think I've used up all of your time, Mike. Thank you.

We'll move on to the five-minute round with MP Webber.

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Madame Chair, I appreciate that.

Thank you for coming here today. I appreciate it.

It's my first time at the Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. I'm honoured to be here. I usually sit on the health committee. I also had the honour of serving as the aboriginal relations minister in Alberta for a number of years early in the 2010s and learned a lot about the first nation communities in Alberta. I just want to say that it was an enlightening experience. It was life-changing for me; it really was. The people in the communities whom I served were just wonderful to me, and I continue to have good friends in the first nations communities in Alberta.

Theodore Johnny, I just want to focus on your career. You're, of course, a professional land manager. You talked about it in your presentation. You've been at it for about seven years now. Where did you get your training?

● (0935)

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: I got it through NALMA. I took the professional land management certification program in 2015, and in 2016 the indigenous peoples resource management program through the University of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Len Webber: Did you have to leave your community in order to go?

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: Definitely. There's no university back in my home community.

Mr. Len Webber: Exactly. Are you the only professional land manager managing your area of 45 reserves in your community?

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: Within Peter Ballantyne, we have almost 50 reserves and eight different communities. I'll just name them quickly: Southend, Kinoosao, Denare Beach, Sturgeon Landing, Kiskaciwan, Pelican Narrows, Deschambault Lake, and Sandy Bay.

Mr. Len Webber: What is the population?

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: It's over 11,000.

Mr. Len Webber: You talked about the fact that you're having difficulty finding others to come and take your place once you train someone because of lack of funding but also lack of job security. I find that hard to understand, because of course it's such a large area, and there's a lot of work to be done. Why do you say that job security is not there? Is it because of the lack of funding?

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: Well, that's part of it, because if my first nation pools its funding for other things, then I am dealt a \$2,000 annual budget from Indigenous Services Canada, and that is basically just enough to keep the heat on. That doesn't pay for salaries, travel to all the communities and what have you.

Yes, with regard to job security, a lot of it also has to do with the fact that, just as in white society, if you have mayors and councils, or if you have provincial elections or federal elections, they all have consequences. What happens when there is a new government in town? They wipe the slate clean, and that happens in a lot of our first nations communities as well. If you have somebody in that capacity who is from a different clan, for example, and then a new clan takes over, basically they're in charge of the whole first nation. They decide who gets the jobs, who gets the positions and what have you.

You know, I am only there at the pleasure of the chief and council, and if they don't like me for whatever reason, I could be gone after the next election, and with me the capacity. Indigenous Services Canada will fund a position only if there is a certified land manager in that position. If there isn't, it goes to heck in a handbasket.

I'll give you one example. Back home, in one of the first nations—I won't name it—my friend was employed as a professional certified land manager. A new chief and council came in and he was gone. He waited until the next election, when some other people were back in office, and he got his job back. In the meantime, they had lost several years of capacity-building and improvement and whatnot.

The more land managers are certified in each community, the better, even if they're not working specifically in that capacity, because a lot of times you need the resources to fund those positions. If the money is not there, you're looking at one member of staff. Some communities have six or seven, and I commend them. Most of us are all by our lonesome in the office.

Mr. Len Webber: Yes.

I would imagine your job is quite secure, though, because you're basically the only professional land manager in your community.

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: I wish.

Mr. Len Webber: Oh, is it not?

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: No. As I said, I serve at the whim of whoever happens to be in power.

Mr. Len Webber: I see, so they have an option to choose someone else in the community.

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: Yes, they do—or nobody.

Mr. Len Webber: Or nobody...?

The Chair: Thank you. We're out of time. That was very quick, but it was the full five minutes.

Now we're going to wrap up with MP Mike Bossio.

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Thank you for being here today. I really appreciate the testimony.

If I read things correctly, on the land management side, as we see from so many witnesses who have come forward, there isn't a one-size-fits-all here when it comes to land management, or even to the engineering and the Technical Services Corporation. When you're dealing with each community, there really needs to be a lens applied to each one to find out what is the best way to serve that community.

Can you give me, though, a sense of some of the best practices you've seen out there as to what can be accomplished within the communities?

Albert, you and I were talking, just from the standpoint of Nova Scotia, about the great success you've had with graduation rates there, because it is indigenous-driven, indigenous-led and indigenous-created. Maybe you can give us a sense of how you can translate that success into the land management side, some of the best practices you've seen across the country and how we can improve it in other communities.

• (0940)

Mr. Albert Marshall Jr.: We're a close-knit community. We're a family at NALMA.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Yes, I see you guys are very close friends, even though you're at opposite ends of the country.

Mr. Albert Marshall Jr.: If I have a problem or an issue with my department, whatever the problem may be, I can always reach out to my colleagues throughout the country via NALMA. The network and opportunities are phenomenal.

If there is a plan that Ted's community developed, they're more than willing to share that plan with me, in order for me, my department or my community to excel. We don't have to reinvent the wheel.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Have you seen any other best practices from other communities as to how they're managing their land?

Mr. Albert Marshall Jr.: Yes, there are best practices out there, everywhere. For instance, in our community we don't have a written rule saying that this is your land, that you're allotted this land. Most of our land is held in custom. People respect that. They don't make big homes, big yards. They're very mindful of the little land base we have. For instance, in my community we occupy only 13% of our whole 8,600 acres. The rest of it is practically unusable.

The way I get around to managing these lands is by asking my colleagues throughout the country how they go about setting these rules.

Mr. Mike Bossio: We had another witness come forward, from the First Nations Land Management Resource Centre. They were going on reserves and training land management on site.

What is the relationship between you and the Land Management Resource Centre? I know you said that in a lot of cases people have to leave the community to get that training. Are they a completely different entity? Are they training in a different aspect of land management than you do?

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: Yes, it's a different organization altogether. Personally, I've never dealt with them.

Just to go back to NALMA, with regard to its services provided across the country, I'll allude to what Albert was saying earlier. NALMA is a great entity because it serves every first nation in the whole country to the best of its capacity. A lot of training happens: a matrimonial real property act training, land-use planning. There's survey help and whatnot.

To allude to what he was talking about with regard to contacting all our old classmates whom we trained with all over the country, that's probably one of the greater aspects of the NALMA program. If it weren't for that, I wouldn't have friends across the country whom I could phone and ask how they went about leasing land to this entity here. The information is free-flowing. It's not being hoarded by each first nation. It's quite nice to see that they're open and honest about sharing their situations with other first nations, because—

Mr. Mike Bossio: I apologize, but my time is running out.

Given that the resource centre is providing that training on reserve within the communities, would it not be beneficial for you to work much more closely together to build on each other's strengths?

● (0945)

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: Yes, I would imagine, if that were the case, but a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work for everybody. You have to look at us as... In Saskatchewan, there are 74 first nations. We're not 74 of one tribe, but many tribes with many languages, many customs and traditions and what have you, encompassing the whole province of Saskatchewan. Across Canada, there are 632 first nations. Somebody in B.C. isn't going to be the same as somebody in Nova Scotia, so you have to approach it with that mindset, not a one-size-fits-all approach. You have to design something that's going to fit as many people as possible, but not necessarily everybody.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Thank you.

Mr. Theodore Johnny Merasty: NALMA is very good at using that approach because it's all-encompassing and it changes where it needs to change and runs with it where it's running smoothly.

The Chair: I'm so sorry, but we have to cut off this session because we have other presenters anxious to get started.

I want to thank you all for coming and presenting to our committee. *Meegwetch*.

We'll suspend and the other presenters can come forward.

● (0945)

(Pause)

● (0950)

The Chair: We're going to get started.

We have a guest who got up early to be with us all the way from B.C. We appreciate that. It's a morning session, and for you the time difference is pretty tough.

I understand that Ms. Jessie Hemphill is ready to go on now, on video conference. She is with Alderhill Planning Inc.

Welcome, and thank you again for participating. You have up to 10 minutes to present.

Ms. Jessie Hemphill (Partner and Senior Planner, Alderhill Planning Inc.): Thank you. *Gilakasla*.

[*Witness spoke in Kwakwala*]

[*English*]

I'm Jessie Hemphill. I'm from the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nations, located on the north bend of Vancouver Island, British Columbia. I'm coming to you today from Nanaimo, B.C., in Snuneymuxw territory, and I'm really happy to have been invited. I also want to acknowledge MP Blaney, whom I see at the side of the room there.

And yes, it is very early here.

I want to keep my comments brief this morning and make a couple of key points. I believe I've been invited to speak to the role of planning, particularly indigenous planning, in capacity-building and talent retention. The first key point I would make is that planning, in particular a style of planning called comprehensive community planning, which I'll describe in a moment, is key to capacity-building beyond economic development. We often think of economic development as the key initiative when it comes to capacity-building, but I'd argue that planning has its role as well, because if it's done properly, it builds capacity at all levels within indigenous communities—in leadership, administration and within the community itself.

I'll share a tiny bit of my background on this topic with you. I have been working in indigenous planning for more than a decade, beginning with my own community, Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nations. I have since gone on to lead planning workshops and have worked with hundreds of communities across Canada. I've probably worked directly as a mentor planner with a couple of dozen first nations in Canada, from coast to coast to coast, on their community planning initiatives, and I've been the facilitator for indigenous planning workshops in many of the provinces and in both of the national comprehensive community planning workshops, one held in Charlottetown and one held in Winnipeg in previous years.

I am a trained planner, and last year I was also recognized at the Canadian Institute of Planners with the young planners award for Canada.

There hasn't been a large-scale study to date on the role of planning in capacity-building, so I'm speaking anecdotally and from personal experience, but I'd just like to convey that it's a pretty extensive personal experience in a field where there are not a lot of people working nationally.

In terms of comprehensive community planning, as I said, this is one of the keys to building up capacity and the structural integrity to do economic development and job training, education, health and all of these things. Comprehensive community planning is a form of planning that was named and developed by indigenous communities in British Columbia in the mid-2000s. It is a form of planning that is long-range. Typically, these plans are for 50 to 100 years, maybe 25 years on the short-term end, and they encompass everything.

You could almost compare it to official community planning for local government, but the scope is even broader than that. Typically, in CCPs we see economic development, lands and resources management, governance, health, culture, social issues, education, infrastructure, housing—all of these things are included in this type of planning.

Another key feature of CCPs is that they are developed by the community according to a process that the community itself determines. The previous speaker, Mr. Marshall Jr., I believe, spoke to challenges around the lack of continuity between the elected leadership. This form of planning, because it's long-range and is created by the community itself, has really done wonders in communities to address this challenge and help ensure some continuity of vision and action.

These plans do not necessarily resemble one another. Another one of the previous speakers, whose name I missed, was asking about best practices and the efficacy of nations building on each other's successes. The response was that our nations have such different needs and contexts that we need flexible solutions. In my opinion, planning, particularly when the community is allowed to define the parameters of the planning process and outcome on its own terms, enables that kind of flexibility.

• (0955)

I would also agree with the previous speaker that balancing that out with mentorship—networks or communities of practice at provincial and national levels—really helps to bring ideas together from various communities and to create those support networks, and it also allows each community to pursue the planning process in its own unique way.

That's just a tiny bit of background. Just for your information, there is a website called comprehensivecommunityplanning.org, if any members of the committee would like to read more about that style of planning.

I think that is the key point.

I wanted to leave most of the time for questions today. I'm happy to take any questions now, through the chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

All right. We're moving to the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. Thank you for coming out. We have Roger Strasser,

Catherine Cervin and Sarita Verma. You have up to 10 minutes for your presentation, any time that you're ready.

Dr. Roger Strasser (Dean and Chief Executive Officer, Northern Ontario School of Medicine): Thank you very much, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

I'm Roger Strasser, dean and CEO of the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. It is my pleasure to share with you NOSM's experience in improving the recruitment and retention of health care professionals in rural, remote and indigenous communities.

With me today are Dr. Catherine Cervin, vice-dean, academic, and Dr. Sarita Verma, who will take over from me as the dean and CEO on July 1, so she's dean and CEO designate for the school.

I'm going to read the prepared remarks, but I also have some slides to show. The prepared remarks are not completely in sync with the slides, so I'm going to refer to the slides quickly as we go through.

Let me say that since its inception, NOSM has proudly defied traditional health professional education. The school was born of a grassroots movement. First of all, I have a slide to show you of Ontario's population distribution. As you can see, northern Ontario is geographically vast and very sparsely populated, with many indigenous communities, first nations and Métis communities.

Northern Ontario School of Medicine opened officially in 2005. It serves as the faculty of medicine at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay and Laurentian University in Sudbury, 1,000 kilometres apart. We have a social accountability mandate, which is a commitment to be responsive to the health needs of the people and the communities of northern Ontario, with a focus on improving the health of the people of northern Ontario.

In sum, I would say that the Northern Ontario School of Medicine is an Ontario government strategy to address the health needs of northern Ontarians, improve access to quality care and contribute to the economic development of northern Ontario.

Essentially, the school was founded on this research evidence, that is, the three factors most strongly associated with going into rural practice after education and training. First is a rural upbringing: having grown up in a rural area. The second factor is positive clinical and educational experiences at the undergraduate level—that's the basic training—in the rural setting: learning in rural clinical settings and community settings. Then, after graduation, the third is the training that prepares the graduates to practise in the rural setting. That's really the evidence base for all activities of the school.

I'll go through the slides quickly.

First, distributed community-engaged learning is our distinctive model of medical education and health research, and this slide shows what it looks like, with over 90 sites in northern Ontario where our students, residents and other learners may undertake part of their clinical learning. Next is community engagement, the centrepiece—that is, the interdependent partnerships that we have with communities right across northern Ontario.

In relation to indigenous communities, we regularly hold what we call indigenous community partnership gatherings. We've had five of them. In the top left-hand corner of this slide you can see that "Follow Your Dreams" was held at Wauzhushk Onigum First Nation in June 2003, and in September 2018, so just recently, we were back at the same first nation for the number five, "Gathering Together for Life and Well-being".

Also, the bottom left-hand side of that slide shows a series of gatherings that were held specifically with a focus on research, the first one in 2008 in Thunder Bay on partnership opportunities in research gathering, and then, in 2016, an indigenous health research gathering that led into the 2017 "Pathways to Well-being" workshop, which was really about involving indigenous youth and looking to a future that doesn't include suicide.

At NOSM, several measures are in place to support physician recruitment and retention. High school students are encouraged to see a future for themselves that might include a health career and studying medicine. The next slide shows that every year at Lakehead University and at Laurentian University we have a week-long health careers camp, which we now call "Camp Med". Then, three times in first nations, we had the "Walking in Two Worlds" health science camps, specifically for first nations young people, with our own indigenous physician graduates as the keynote speakers in each of the three first nations.

●(1000)

We have also been working in Nunavut, and I'll say more about this shortly. We held a health careers camp in February of last year with federal government support, and we're planning another one in May of this year, which brings together high school students from the communities across Nunavut, similar to the camps in northern Ontario. It's really about making the connection between what they're learning in high school and health careers.

These are some pictures from the health careers camp in Nunavut in February of last year.

We also have a partnership with Matawa First Nations Management and Eabametoong First Nation, so we have a remote first nation residency stream in our family medicine residency program. We are also active in a partnership with other agencies in northern Ontario and have developed a physician resource action plan for northern Ontario.

We have this international dimension, which I'm going to dwell on momentarily. Before I do, this slide shows some of the outcomes from the school. These are quotes from our students. I think the one that's highlighted, "you don't know it until you live it", really sums up the value of our program.

With regard to this slide on career directions that are chosen by our graduates from our MD program, it's 62% family medicine—

mostly rural. That's almost double the national average for Canada for those going into family medicine. You can see that 12% of our graduates are indigenous physicians. When you look at the graduates from the MD program who did their residency in northern Ontario, 94% are practising in northern Ontario, including about a third in the small or remote rural communities.

On this slide, you see that recruiting and retaining health care professionals for rural, remote and indigenous communities is an ongoing challenge in many parts of the world. The school has garnered an international reputation for its success in improving northern Ontario's ability to recruit and retain health professionals.

Since 2011, we've been partnering with countries in the north of Europe for European Union-funded projects. The most recent one started in 2015. It's the Recruit and Retain 2: Making it Work project, which is putting into practice in different jurisdictions in the northern periphery and Arctic region what we learned from the first project. NOSM is part of this because of our success, expertise and experience in transforming the northern Ontario health care landscape. As I said, most recently we've been working in Nunavut, as well, with the Government of Nunavut Department of Health and others in Nunavut.

In January of this year, we had a big forum—multi-site, multi-country video forum—where we presented the framework for remote rural stability. That's what's on the screen. I'm going to speak quite a bit more about that now. It's the result of that seven-year partnership, and the lead partners are now Sweden, Scotland, Norway, Iceland and us, for Canada. It's about stakeholders getting together and drawing on the evidence and lived experience of what works, what's successful in recruiting and retaining health and other public sectors in remote rural communities.

Let me quickly take you through this framework. You'll see that there are three components, and each of them has three elements.

There's planning. It's really important to start by looking at the health needs of the population, and then design a service model that meets the needs of that population and is attractive to physicians and other health care providers. Then it's targeting where you're going to find those particular providers to recruit them. That's the planning.

Recruiting, then, is about sharing the information and active community participation, community engagement, supporting and recognizing that when you recruit a physician or other health workforce into a community, it's a whole family. The family has to feel at home and wanting to be in the community.

Retaining is equally important. It's a workplace that's supportive, with continuous professional development and training the next generation. That's the retaining part.

This is the very last slide. In the centre of that circle are the essentials for success, recognizing that remote, rural, indigenous communities are each unique. They have their own perspective. The service models that work best in those communities are designed in those communities, for those communities.

• (1005)

That means active community participation. That means real investment, real money and resources to actually make this happen, to make this work, as well as having an annual cycle of activities, not just doing it once but on a regular basis, and ensuring that you're continuing to monitor that.

In summary, you have to set your goals and your vision, keep your eyes on the prize and stick to it, because there are plenty of naysayers, plenty of doubters. What I've learned is to smile and nod to them, and then just get on and do what I was planning to do in the first place, challenge conventional wisdom.

In a very short way, I've told you about the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, about our success in the recruitment and retention of our health workforce in northern Ontario and supporting work in Nunavut, in partnership with international partners—

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Roger Strasser: —and in particular with the remote rural workforce stability framework.

Thank you.

The Chair: I know it can seem that the 10 minutes is flying by, but we have three additional witnesses who are here.

I understand that you are going to split the 10 minutes any way you choose. Any time you're ready, please start.

Chief Delbert Wapass (Advisor, Thunderchild First Nation): Thank you very much.

Good morning to each and every one of you, and to our colleagues with whom we're sharing the table. I'd like to recognize the traditional territory of the Algonquin.

My name is Delbert Wapass. I'm from Thunderchild First Nation, which is an independent band within the province of Saskatchewan. Our population is 2,850. We have a K-to-12 school. We don't get second- and third-level service funding. We have to find creative and innovative ways and partnerships, and go out and seek those positive relationships and find someone to partner with.

The challenge of the 21st century centres around skills. This is where, as a former chief of Thunderchild First Nation, as a former vice-chief of the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, and as a former chair of the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies,

First Nations University of Canada, and the Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre, I have come to realize that it all comes back to the community. When we look at what we can do in our community and how we can get it right, we see that we can't have success at the post-secondary level if we're not going to have success at the elementary and secondary levels.

We've always lacked capacity because we've never been given enough money. When you look at what we get versus what others get in terms of nominal roll dollars, the operations and maintenance of the school, the capacity and so on, we never get enough, yet we're always compared. We are 13 kilometres from Turtleford School in the town of Turtleford, and we're always compared by our membership: "Why is Turtleford able to do this or that, and you're not?" As a result, we lose students to Turtleford School.

When we looked at the dollars they get versus the dollars we get, we said, "Okay, fine. We know the issue. We know the story," and so on and so forth. How can we turn that around and provide quality to start building the building blocks, our teachers, to suit the needs of our community? If we build a solid program, what helps us build that solid program? How do we come together to ensure that the program we're building is what our community believes in, so that they turn around and start sending their students to the school on our reserve, the Piyesiw Awasis School?

To my left here is Peter Istvanffy, and he represents the Calgary Academy. The Calgary Academy is a private school. We felt that we didn't want to partner up with the public school division or the Catholic school division in Saskatoon, and so on and so forth, because they're unionized. As a private school in Thunderchild, we are not able to get them to move in regard to our needs within our respective communities. However, the Calgary Academy, being what it is, was able to move together, and through research identify what is needed, where it's needed and so on and so forth.

We went through an extensive process to finally win over the Calgary Academy as a legitimate partner. It's not a franchise. We were accused: "You guys went and partnered up with a franchise that will come in..." No, it's not that, and you'll hear the story.

To my right is George Lafond. George Lafond has been instrumental in advising and helping us build the education system that we feel, at the end of the day, will be a model for other first nations to build on.

There's a lot of money going out, but we want to use it to help shape the system and ensure we're getting a big enough bang for the dollar. We don't get enough, but it doesn't mean we can't provide what we need in our community, to the best of our ability, on behalf of our students and our community.

•(1010)

Education: If you don't have it, you ain't getting jobs. We know the unemployment rates. We know the housing rates. We know the health rates in our community, and everything is geared towards prevention.

With that, Madam Chair, I'd like to turn things over to Peter, and then to George.

Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Peter.

Mr. Peter Istvanffy (Consultant, Headwater Learning Solutions): Thank you very much.

I have just a few things, to put it into context.

Calgary Academy is a private school, for sure. We deal with LD kids, learning-disabled students. Typically, in the community school system, about 14% of LD kids graduate from high school. Our claim to fame is that we have the enviable record of a 100% graduation rate and 88% of the kids going on to post-secondary, so we have a track record there.

The other side of it is that we have two other organizations. One is called Headwater Learning Solutions, which is the group that actually works with the Thunderchild First Nation. We have a foundation called the Calgary Academy Education and Research Foundation, which raises the money to do the work that we do so there's no dollar expenditure to the first nation, although Indigenous Services Canada is a partner in this. We're quite pleased that way.

Basically, the way this project came about was that we were approached by a group of Canadian philanthropists who were aware of the work we had done in inner city communities in the United States, where we had achieved extraordinary results, and some of the work we had done in developing nations. They asked us if we had ever done anything with first nations. We said no, that we'd never really been approached. They funded a two-year study, and we spent two years investigating first nations education in Canada.

Part of that two years was reviewing all the research and what the research said. Another part of the process was to go out and talk to people involved in first nations education across Canada. We started on the west coast, in Victoria, and we went across to the east coast into the Maritimes. We basically talked to chiefs, education directors, teachers, principals, etc. We were trying to get a good feel for what they saw as being the needs in the community. The final piece was to visit. I visited more than 100 different first nations communities to find out what they were actually doing. That's where Delbert and I, and George, came across each other.

One of the reasons for selecting the Thunderchild First Nation was having a chief and council unconditionally committed to excellence in first nations education. I could tell, having visited the school on more than one occasion, that the community embraced education. Although the results weren't there, there was certainly an enthusiasm for it.

The goal of the project is pretty straightforward. It's to develop an educational exemplar that's sustainable in the first nation's community—in Thunderchild, by Thunderchild First Nation—and the

capacity, should they so choose or should other first nation communities be interested, to replicate it in other places.

We use the research-led, evidence-based approach to develop the capacity. Certainly, one of the key things is teacher retention. Our claim to fame at the Calgary Academy was having 90% of the original teachers who had started with us still there after 25 years. We've developed mechanisms for making this such an engaging and rewarding experience for teachers that they don't leave.

I could keep going on, but I'll just say that we're 18 months into it, and we've already seen some impressive results in terms of the growth in some of the key metrics.

The metrics we're looking at have three dimensions to them. The first one is educational: reading, writing and arithmetic, of course. The second one is teacher capacity to deal with the social, emotional and mental health issues of the students, and how we develop teacher capacity to do that. The third one is how we develop teacher capacity to deal with the cultural aspects of education.

That's where we are at this particular point in time.

George, go ahead.

•(1015)

Mr. George E. Lafond (Strategic Development Advisor, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Peter.

Thank you very much, Delbert.

Good morning, Madam Chair and everybody.

Jessie, welcome to Ottawa. There's a lot of snow here.

I've been involved in public service for about 40 years. I came out of high school, went to university and became a high school teacher. I taught at Bedford Road Collegiate, in Saskatoon. One of my most recent assignments was to work with the University of Saskatchewan. I'm quite familiar with what the northern Ontario medical team is doing here.

All my life, my public service has been in the field of education in some way or another. When I was looking at issues in terms of how I would capstone my career, Delbert came to me and asked me if I could assist in his community because he was the chief on this education file. We were looking at ways to become more engaged in K to 12 and post-secondary. I thought this would be a capstone opportunity for me to get one project, because I was part of the national panel that went across Canada to take a look at first nations education.

We had Bill C-33 fail in the Harper government, where we would've had education out of the Indian Act and the opportunity for indigenous communities to have control over this. That failed, so I felt this was an opportunity for me to be part of a stand-alone band that had an opportunity to take on something very special and dear to all of us in the first nations community, which is the education of our children.

I had an opportunity to meet with Peter and his associates and saw that they wanted to have a true partnership where we had to work together. This agreement was signed. It's good to see our friend Don Rusnak, who is from Treaty No. 3 territory in Ontario, I believe. He came out and signed that partnership on behalf of the federal government. We're a year and a half into it. We have another year and a half.

What we're looking for... You'll understand this if you understand how indigenous community schools are funded. We're not looking for funding per capita; we're looking for funding per success. We believe that in the next number of years we will show—and we will show you through your questions—that by doing it right and having the right capacity inside a school system we can have success.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1020)

The Chair: We're in the question period for members of Parliament. I would remind you that we have Jessie on the line, so please direct your questions, whether they are to our guest on video conference or to somebody in the room.

We'll start with MP Robillard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard: I thank the witnesses for their comments.

My first questions are for Mr. Lafond.

The new approach to funding education on reserves will come into effect on April 1. Can you tell us about funding-related difficulties you encountered during your career, when you worked in education on reserves? What is your opinion about this new approach?

[*English*]

Mr. George E. Lafond: I would say that this is half full and half empty. I think Canadians have begun to recognize through the government that indigenous education is chronically underfunded. The new funding arrangement has come forward, where we actually now have what I often cautioned leaders about, provincial equivalency. I kept arguing that we were not looking for provincial equivalency, but in fact we were looking at the needs of the child. Every child has a special requirement based on the type of home or the community they came from. Being attached to provincial equivalency gives us a bit of a bump; there's an increase. However, if you really have the child focus, you have to go to what the child needs.

So I think in many ways it's half full and half empty. What I think we're all looking for inside of any capacity-building or any public institution, whether it's health care or education, is consistent, predictable funding. Unfortunately, right now most first nations schools operate—and Delbert can answer this—on a year-to-year funding arrangement. In order to have proper planning and proper predictability, you need to have long-term funding that is guaranteed. That way you can plan further, longer.

From my point of view, giving advice to the Thunderchild community, we certainly welcome the new funding arrangement. We've gone through it side by side. There is an increase. One of the biggest areas that concern us, though, is the issue of learning supports. This is where we're going to start moving into the issue

of... It's not only education we're worried about inside of our institutions, but also the health care of our young people. What we're seeing... We've done this through the Calgary Academy. They've done the assessments and they've recognized that mental health issues inside first nation communities are very serious issues that reflect upon the ability of a child to learn in a very safe and secure environment.

It's not only education we're beginning to look at, but also child and family services. You'll see other programs you're quite familiar with, such as the Jordan principle, and we also welcome the most recent legislation on child and family services agreements. We think that when you combine those with education, you actually have an opportunity to support the child to have a healthy learning environment.

It's not only the education funding arrangement that we're looking at, but the other types of social supports that are inside the Indigenous Services Canada framework.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard: I'd now like to discuss the issue of retaining talent on reserves. During testimony over the past weeks, we heard that the quality of employees' benefits was a determining factor.

In your opinion, what other factors adversely impact the retention of talent?

• (1025)

[*English*]

Mr. George E. Lafond: I think all of us in western Canada are facing this. There's a depopulation of rural Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba, so it's not only first nation communities that are facing this issue of attracting talent, but even small towns and small cities.

This is why it's important that Thunderchild is seen as a leader in this. They have reached out to a partner who has the capabilities in another jurisdiction. I think that for too long in Saskatchewan, as first nation communities, we've been at odds with small-town Saskatchewan. While the small towns are depopulating, the population in first nation communities is increasing, so small towns are slowly dwindling and yet there is a first nation community that's actually building and growing. We're building schools, building health care facilities, and yet the hospitals and the small-town grocery stores are slowly flittering away.

I think what we're talking about is social capital. For all of us who grew up in Saskatchewan, we grew up in two solitudes, and now I think it's about time, as a new generation... But it's very difficult because we're facing these issues of racism and discrimination. There is built-in racism inside the school systems, inside the health care systems. There's no disputing that, but how we begin to recognize the future depends on our ability to work together.

So I think in terms of building capacity and basically sharing responsibilities for our young people and for the future of Saskatchewan—certainly in the part of Saskatchewan we're in—we need to begin to build those bridges based on social capital. We're working together.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: My next question is for Mr. Istvanffy.

Headwater Learning Solutions, under the Indigenous Education Project, identified three main elements necessary for a holistic indigenous education model. These are: the creation of a teacher orientation program, the development of a literacy and numeracy program, and the implementation of modern learning elements to build a model more compatible with traditional indigenous ways of life.

Can you tell us how these components contribute to an enhanced education delivery system for first nations students?

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Peter Istvanffy: I'm sorry, but the interpretation is not working.

Mr. George E. Lafond: How do you create those programs for literacy and science?

Mr. Peter Istvanffy: There are a number of things involved, but number one is making sure that by the time students have completed grade 3 they can read at that level, because it's the single biggest predictor of whether or not students will graduate from high school. The research on that is unbelievable. That's number one.

Number two, one of the things we have to do around science and the whole STEM program—science, technology, engineering and mathematics—is to look at ways in which we can use technology-enabled solutions to build and deliver those types of programs. There are some excellent ones available out there. One of our challenges was that the funding didn't allow for the technology to be in the schools. It was just this last year that we secured additional grants to bring in laptops, iPads and the infrastructure necessary to deliver it.

We would see it as critical for participation in the 21st century, but part of it is having the resources necessary to do it. We have that in place now, and we're looking forward to what we can accomplish in the next 18 months.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: You've run out of time.

We move on to MP Jim Eglinski. Welcome to our committee.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question will go to Jessie. You were talking about planning and the difficulties, and I think you were following on a very similar trend to what Theodore was saying earlier, prior to you.

There's a shortage of planners in many aboriginal communities. I was quite surprised when Theodore mentioned that he was looking after approximately 11,000 people on the reserve and a certain amount of acreage, and he was the only planner. When I was the mayor of Fort St. John, I probably had four or five planners looking after the same number of people.

I wonder if you could just stress that and tell me what kind of shortage you see and where you think we can improve.

● (1030)

Ms. Jessie Hemphill: There's a shortage of planners. I served a couple of terms in local government myself, and for our municipality, as you said, we had one planner covering a territory about one-fiftieth of the territory of my own first nation, which doesn't even have a professional planner on staff, so there's a huge deficit there. In planning in general, there's no designated funding outside of the land code process, the Framework Agreement on First Nation Land Management, for funding and support for first nations planners or land managers, so that's a big challenge.

I also think that planning in indigenous communities is very different from planning for municipalities. Of course, we're looking at different paradigms depending on what community you're talking about. We all have different customs. The Wet'suwet'en issues up in north central B.C. highlight different ideas of jurisdiction between hereditary leaders, elected leaders and staff—competing levels of jurisdiction.

I think there's a need to train planners who understand these complexities and are prepared to go into indigenous communities and work with the needs of a specific community. There are very few planning programs in general in Canada, almost none. I think UBC is the only one on the west coast that has an indigenous community planning stream, and I believe there are only eight students in that program. I'm a practicum supervisor there. Vancouver Island University has a professional planning program with a first nations focus as well, but that's it for western Canada, aside from Manitoba, which has some great programs, and then there's the east coast.

There's absolutely a shortage there, so planning often falls to folks who are economic development coordinators or capital managers, or it doesn't happen at all—or you're bringing in consultants like me, which is not necessarily cost-effective for the community, so more funding and support would be great.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Thank you very much for that.

Now I'd like to move on to Delbert. Congratulations for stepping outside the box and looking outside of your community for help, and working with Peter and George. It's obvious that you guys had a good meeting that first session and came up with a great strategy. And hats off to you for having 100% graduation.

Your program must be unique. You're focusing on each student individually, I would think, if you're getting the results that you're talking about. But then we have the general program. There must be a greater cost to do what you're doing. I was wondering if you could tell us...

Delbert, you were talking about financial commitment, that it needs to be sustainable. The fact that you're getting it every year... I think, George, you were kind of following through that.

Your program sounds great, Peter. I know it probably costs more than the general program does, but I wonder if you could give us a little comparison so that we can have an idea. If we can look at programs like these, then we're focusing on the individual students, to get them there. Due to the difficulties we're having on a lot of the reserves, I think it's very important for us to understand that there is a greater cost to meet.

Chief Delbert Wapass: That's a good question.

Quickly, again, everything is based on nominal roll. We get audited: these students qualify and those students don't qualify. You shake your head. You scratch your head. You figure out, okay, why are these students not qualifying? Here's what you get, and here's what you don't get, and so on and so forth.

When it comes to teacher capacity, you're balancing your budget based on years of experience of your teachers. Once they get to a certain year of experience, you have no choice but to say, "See you later. As good as you are, we'd like to retain you, but our budget doesn't allow that." So you're constantly disrupting your program, and as a result....

When we look at the investment the Calgary Academy makes within the program, where's that investment going when we don't have the money to retain these teachers beyond the training they just received from the Calgary Academy? We are finding out that in some instances, the teachers, not realizing it—and this happens in every other school—are teaching 15 minutes out of a 50-minute program. Why is that? Do they recognize that? We also understand that they are dealing with a lot of social issues, and so on and so forth.

When our kids are struggling with suicide and so on and so forth, we come back to the very basis, and a very big part of our program is "Who am I as a Thunderchild citizen?", and understanding their customs, their traditions and their ceremony. This is where the Calgary Academy comes in.

• (1035)

Mr. Peter Istvanffy: You're absolutely correct. There are more dollars involved in it.

The way it's working right now is that we generate, in terms of philanthropic resources, just over half a million dollars a year that goes into the teacher development program. Then Indigenous Services Canada is putting in about \$400,000. So we're putting about \$900,000 into the development of teacher capacity.

We are really working along the three levels, and we have multiple professionals working with them. We have teacher trainers. We have people who are familiar with the indigenous culture doing the culture development piece. They're typically academics from the post-secondaries. Then we have psychologists and other mental health professionals working with the teachers.

In addition to that, we got some additional resources last year through Jordan's principle and other resources to provide mental health workers to deal with a number of the mental health issues, etc.

We were in a meeting just last week. We said that by the end of the three years we'd be able to provide a much more precise figure of

what it costs to generate success, because we're spending a lot of time documenting that.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Thank you for doing that.

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Rachel Blaney takes the questions now.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

I want to thank everybody so much for being here with us.

I'm going to start with Jessie.

Good morning. I'm sure you're going to enjoy the beautiful sunshine and up to 18°C back home. So enjoy and send me photos.

I really appreciated your testimony. I think one of the parts you bring that's unique to this is that you've worked with indigenous communities across Canada. I'm wondering, as we're looking specifically at capacity-building and training, whether there are major themes that you're seeing across Canada, in the communities in which you're working, that are barriers to those two particular things, training for their community members and capacity-building.

Ms. Jessie Hemphill: One of the previous speakers mentioned rural depopulation being an issue. I think the government, in some cases, exacerbates this by centralizing essential services in urban centres. I grew up in a town of 4,000 people. We saw, over the years, those services centralized in your hometown, three hours away from us. That makes it a challenge, and I see that across Canada.

I also see that varying types of relationships with Indigenous Services Canada have been a barrier. In British Columbia, I would say that, compared to the rest of Canada, we have quite a positive relationship, and communities are allowed to exercise self-government in many ways through many programs. I do not see that in the rest of Canada. There are particular provinces and territories where the relationships between the communities and their funding service officers or other folks in federal government are totally toxic. I have first-hand experience of the differences in relationships, that systemic racism, in other provinces, which I haven't really seen as much in British Columbia.

The third and final thing I'd like to mention here is that access to land is an issue. Obviously, in British Columbia, we're unceded territory. The question of jurisdiction, the return of those traditional territories to nations, is a make-or-break issue when it comes to capacity development and talent retention. We cannot have healthy economies without a land base on which to grow our economies and our economic development.

In other parts of Canada, where nations have secured stronger access to their land base or stronger compensation in lieu of access to that land base, I see a lot more capacity-building happening. Where that land is not accessible or has been degraded over time by industry or other activities outside of a nation's control, I see big challenges.

• (1040)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Jessie. I really appreciate what you said earlier about accessing services and the challenges that more rural and remote communities face.

I guess the other part of the question is this: What are the specific barriers for the rural and remote communities across Canada that you've worked with? Are they just about accessing services? Are they about sending people away and having a hard time getting them to return home and to do the work? What are those challenges, specifically, for those more rural communities?

Ms. Jessie Hemphill: It's very holistic. I worked with the Sayisi Dene in Tadoule Lake, northern Manitoba. They're a one-hour flight north of Thompson, fly-in only. In that community, it's a very basic thing. If a lock breaks on the band office, it could take them weeks to bring in a locksmith to replace it. In that time, their assets are unprotected.

It's a diesel-dependent community with an ice road. With climate change, as the length of time that the ice road is open for diesel trucks to come in shrinks with the warming climate, that community faces growing crises as diesel runs out every year. In that community, certainly bringing in teachers or training programs and even having access to the Internet—all of these very basic things—are incredible challenges that we wouldn't experience in other, more urban places. Yes, access to those basic infrastructural services and supports is key.

Then also, of course, there's the isolation. That community was relocated, so there are mental health challenges that come from the relocation process and the systemic racism they've experienced. These issues are all very complicated.

Again, like other speakers, I would advocate for a community-by-community response.

In this particular case, I would also advocate for off-grid alternative energy sources. All of these things that strengthen the resilience of rural and remote communities also strengthen their resilience when it comes to climate change or other issues. Independent food production, independent power production and the strengthening of their community-based decision-making structures I think are essential in capacity-building and talent retention, but also in other significant areas.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you so much, Jessie.

I'm going to come over here and talk to the amazing doctors who are doing all of this great work in rural and remote communities. I just thought it was amazing.

One thing you mentioned in your presentation is that 12% of your graduates are indigenous. I just want to hear more about how you're making that work in the communities.

Dr. Roger Strasser: As I said, our selection and admissions process favours applicants who come from northern Ontario or from similar northern, remote, rural, indigenous and francophone backgrounds. Indigenous applicants have a boost, shall we say, in being considered.

Having said that, we don't have set-aside places for indigenous students. The reasoning for that was advice we had from indigenous people who said, "As soon as you have a quota, as soon as you have reserved seats, you create a stigma that these students are coming in through the back door or the side door." The indigenous applicants have to compete for their place in the school and meet the same standards as all the other applicants, but we do provide them with assistance. There's an indigenous admissions stream, where potential indigenous applicants are given assistance to present themselves as best they can in their written application. Then only indigenous applicants who are called for interviews are given special training to prepare for the form of interview that we have.

It's roughly 2% of our applicant pool who are indigenous and 12% of our students, so you can see that what we do actually does make a difference, and 12% of our graduates are indigenous physicians.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I know I'm almost out of time, but I really wanted to express my appreciation. That is exactly what we need. The young indigenous people need to see amazing leaders.

I thank you for that.

Dr. Roger Strasser: I'll tell you one story, if I may. There's a place called Chapleau, which is in the central part of northern Ontario. It's two hours from anywhere—quite remote. It's a microcosm of Canada, really: 50% of the population is French-speaking, with three first nations nearby.

Chapleau went for nearly seven years without a permanent doctor. Since July 2012, they've had three homegrown physicians. The three of them grew up in Chapleau. They did their MD and their residency training with NOSM, and now they practise together in Chapleau.

Doris Mitchell is from Brunswick House First Nation, and this past July, she moved her clinic to Chapleau Cree First Nation. She's providing care for indigenous and non-indigenous clientele on the reserve.

• (1045)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

The Chair: That's a great story, and we want to see more of that, absolutely.

I want to thank everybody for coming out. We appreciate it. I know that many of you travelled a long way. Thank you for sharing your success stories. We're very impressed with the things you've done in Saskatchewan and northern Ontario.

All members, thank you very much.

Meegwetch.

The meeting is adjourned.

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