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Chair

Ms. Julie Dabrusin

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.)): We will now begin the 146th meeting of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

Today, we are continuing our study of Bill C-91, An Act respecting Indigenous languages.

We have with us as an individual, Mr. Roger Jones, Special Adviser to the National Chief, Languages Act, who was with us just recently.

From Amnesty International Canada, we have Mr. Craig Benjamin, Campaigner, Indigenous Rights.

From Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., we have Aluki Kotierk, President, and Kilikvak Kabloona, CEO.

I would like to begin with an apology to those from the NTI. We tried to have an Inuit interpreter accredited through translation services in time for this meeting. We were unable to find someone accredited. I know we've talked about it, but I did want to formally apologize.

Just so the committee knows, when NTI does their opening statement, it will be in Inuktitut. They will be reading the formal statement, and the translators will be reading it in English and in French. Questions and answers will be in English and in French.

On that note, we can begin with Roger Jones, please.

Mr. Roger Jones (Special Advisor to the National Chief, Languages Act, Assembly of First Nations, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair. *Meegwetch.*

[Witness spoke in Anishinabek]

[English]

Thank you for the invitation to come and speak to the committee.

I can speak primarily to the codevelopment process, which I was involved in, and I do want to point out that I am here on an independent basis.

I am an independent contractor with the Assembly of First Nations and was assigned to the indigenous languages initiative to provide leadership on behalf of the AFN in the codevelopment process. My views about the process and the outcome are mine and are not attributable to the Assembly of First Nations.

There was no definition of “codevelopment” as the process got under way and evolved along the way, but it was methodical, in my opinion.

The AFN has its own structure and organization around the process, including a chiefs committee made up of representatives from across the country and, likewise, a technical committee similarly representative of the regions across the country. The national chief chairs the chiefs committee and has provided leadership on this matter overall.

The most important element of the AFN structure and organization is the chiefs in assembly, and they provided authorization and direction along the way based on the information provided to them stemming from the rights holders engagements that we conducted as part of this process.

Insofar as the interaction between the parties is concerned, one of the first significant steps taken was the parties agreeing to some fundamental principles relating to the process and the desired outcome of indigenous languages legislation.

The principles did establish that we would work collaboratively, transparently and on a distinctions basis to develop the legislation and that the legislation would address revitalization, recovery, preservation, protection, maintenance and promotion of first nations, Inuit and Métis languages.

We operated on a couple of levels. There was a multilateral process, but there were also bilateral processes between each of the parties and the federal government.

The principles firmly established that the intended outcome would respect and implement the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the federal government's commitment to nation-to-nation, government-to-government or Inuit-Crown relationships.

The principle was also established that the legislation would recognize that indigenous languages are fundamental to indigenous self-determination and that such legislation would, among other things, further affirm and address the right of indigenous peoples to revitalize, use, develop and transmit their languages to future generations, including through the control of their educational systems and institutions. It also established that each of the parties would conduct their own engagements in relation to getting the instruction and the direction about input and contributions to the process.

With respect to engagement, last week the national chief shared with you the engagement report we produced as a result of the meetings we held across the country. The basic question we asked people was what their expectations were about what the legislation should say. We didn't predetermine or prejudge anything. It was wide open.

The people who participated in it worked in this area of language revitalization: the champions, the teachers and the academics but also the rights holders and elders who came to our sessions and told us what their expectations were. The contributions we got from these sessions were very consistent across the country, from British Columbia through to the Maritimes and with respect to first nations communities in the north.

The engagement report generally captures the voices we heard, and then we turned the engagement report into a set of 11 principles, which was the direction that was provided from the chiefs in assembly, reflecting what the engagement report said about what people had said in relation to what they wanted the legislation to say. That was our direction and now it's our measure: Does the legislation in fact cover these issues, these points and these expectations?

We did make sure that the people understood that not necessarily everything gets into the legislation in terms of what needs to happen in relation to federal support for language revitalization, that some might have to find its way into regulations; some of it might actually have to find its way through policy work or through funding work in terms of the expenditure authorizations that will be necessary to support this work; and that work is going to take place, has begun and will continue through to ensuring that the intentions that are expressed and set out in the legislation actually materialize.

I've been involved in other processes where, after the legislation was developed and processed in Parliament, the engagement between the indigenous party or parties and the federal government was discontinued. Thus, the work around implementation did not produce the kinds of changes and supports that people had in mind in designing the legislation. Therefore, we believe it's critical for that codevelopment work to continue. Where there might be questions or uncertainties in relation to what the legislation says in parts, we hope we're going to be able to clarify that with greater certainty in terms of the work on regulations or policy, or as I alluded to earlier, funding—the funding regime that needs to support implementation.

We had our fundamental set of principles that we got from our engagement process, and we forwarded that into the codevelopment process, which again produced a set of 12 principles, which then were intended to inform the development of the legislation itself. Then we went from consensus principles to the development of something called “the technical discussion paper”. The technical discussion paper took the form of a framework or outline of what this legislation now says. We worked together on formulating the broad framework and outline.

Obviously there was a memorandum to cabinet that we weren't involved in, and that's a challenge that we would have liked to have overcome but didn't. We were somewhat involved in some of the drafting work. We had access to the earlier drafts of the bill, by signing confidentiality agreements and by getting the executive to provide that access for us.

There were challenges, mostly with respect to the transparency area, because we did not see some products that resulted from the discussions, and yes, there are improvements to be made. We had desired a further elaboration of clause 6 in relation to section 35. That would have included further elaborating what the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has to say about these issues.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Craig Benjamin, from Amnesty International Canada.

Mr. Craig Benjamin (Campaigner, Indigenous Rights, Amnesty International Canada): Thank you.

I would like to acknowledge the Algonquin people, on whose lands we have the privilege of meeting, and I would also like to thank the members of the standing committee for this opportunity to appear before you.

As the chair said, my name is Craig Benjamin. I'm a member of the staff of Amnesty International Canada, where I coordinate the organization's program of work to promote the human rights of first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples in Canada.

Like a number of other individuals and organizations who will be appearing before the committee, Amnesty International is an active participant in the Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This is a network of indigenous and non-indigenous organizations and individuals that have been deeply involved with the development of international standards protecting the rights of indigenous peoples, including particularly the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

I would like to begin by highlighting three passages from the bill that I think are extremely important in the context of living up to Canada's existing commitments and obligations in respect of the human rights of indigenous peoples.

In clause 6, which Roger Jones referred to, Bill C-91 provides explicit recognition that:

the rights of Indigenous peoples recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 include rights related to Indigenous languages.

In its preamble, the bill takes note of the fact that rights related to indigenous languages are also affirmed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which the Government of Canada has committed to fully implement. The bill appropriately names among its purposes advancing the objectives of the UN declaration as it relates to indigenous languages.

In addition, the very first sentence of this bill is the statement:

recognition and implementation of rights related to Indigenous languages are at the core of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples

These various affirmations that the preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages is a matter of human rights protected in both domestic and international law are important and welcome. I hope that this understanding of the language rights of indigenous peoples will guide not only future implementation of the proposed legislation, but also how Parliament continues to engage with the question of Canada's wider responsibilities to support indigenous languages.

Unlike others speaking here today, I am not an expert on indigenous languages or language revitalization. However, work alongside indigenous partners in Canada has consistently highlighted the central importance of indigenous languages to the well-being of indigenous peoples and to the survival of their distinct cultures and traditions. It's often said that all rights are interdependent and indivisible. This is amply illustrated by the importance of indigenous language to all other rights that indigenous peoples seek to exercise and enjoy, including rights to identity, to livelihood and subsistence, and to education, health and self-determination.

The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has used the phrase "inseparable and mutually reinforcing" to describe the relationship between indigenous languages and indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge systems. Another UN body, the expert mechanism on indigenous peoples, has said that indigenous languages contain within them the tools by which indigenous governance, law and jurisdiction are defined and realized.

In this context, Amnesty International has been deeply concerned over Canada's persistent failure to provide adequate and sustained support to the urgent work of first nations, Inuit and Métis organizations to ensure their languages can be protected, revitalized and practised. In fact, colleagues with the francophone branch of Amnesty International in Canada have marked the International Year of Indigenous Languages by launching a major public campaign calling for increased and ongoing supports to indigenous language programming and services.

Certainly, Amnesty International is not alone among international human rights organizations in raising these concerns. The survival of indigenous languages in Canada has been a persistent theme of UN treaty bodies and special mechanisms when they have examined whether or not Canada is living up to its existing human rights obligations.

In 2016, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the independent expert committee that reviews state compliance with the requirements of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, called on Canada to "step up the efforts needed to promote the preservation and use of indigenous languages", including ensuring the ability to use indigenous languages in schools.

• (1545)

In the report of his 2014 official mission to Canada, the then UN special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Dr. James Anaya, flagged the underfunding of indigenous language protection and revitalization as a critical part of what he characterized as a human rights crisis facing first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

As these examples make clear, not only do indigenous peoples have a clear right to protect, revitalize and practise their languages, there is also a corresponding obligation on the part of the federal, provincial and territorial governments to help establish the conditions in which this right can be fully realized and enjoyed.

Article 13 of the UN declaration affirms that indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons. This same article calls on states to take effective measures to support this right.

Article 14 of the declaration similarly protects the rights of indigenous peoples to provide education in their own language, and goes on to say that states shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access when possible to education and their own culture and for it to be provided in their own language.

The UN declaration is a highly authoritative source of interpretation of state obligations, having been subject to decades of detailed deliberation and now having been repeatedly affirmed as a consensus global instrument. The declaration, however, is not alone in recognizing these obligations. The declaration was built on the foundations of human rights norms and standards that preceded it.

Critically, I want to highlight the fact that when identified groups are at heightened risk of human rights violations, states have even greater obligations to protect and promote their rights. Where the state itself is responsible for violation of those rights, there is a duty of redress. The standard redress in international law requires states to take every reasonable effort to undo the harm that they have inflicted or allowed to happen and to prevent continued harm in the future.

To live up to the duty of redress, programs and policies adopted by the Government of Canada must be in proportion to the grave harms that were done to indigenous language speakers and to the capacity of indigenous peoples to live in their own languages. Therefore, they must be sufficient to address the real and diverse needs of indigenous peoples across Canada.

The legislation before this committee will not be the entire solution, but it's our hope that its passage will establish a clear intention and a clear direction for the federal government to live up to its human rights obligations when it comes to that crucial stage, as Roger Jones said, of implementation.

Thank you very much.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Aluki Kotierk and Kilivac Kabloona of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.

Ms. Aluki Kotierk (President, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.): [*Witness spoke in Inuktitut and provided the following translation:*]

Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to the committee for inviting me to speak today about Bill C-91.

First, I would like to applaud the committee for recognizing that indigenous languages must be written into Canadian law. This is essential if Canada is to grow back into its Arctic identity.

Inuktitut is one of the healthier indigenous languages in Canada, reportedly spoken by 84% of residents in Inuit Nunangat, the Inuit homeland in Canada. This makes Inuit Nunangat the largest indigenous language area in Canada.

In Nunavut, the Nunavut Act gives the Nunavut legislature the power to make laws in relation to Inuktitut. As a result, Inuktitut is an official language at the territorial level. We have a territorial Inuit Language Protection Act and a languages commissioner. Our 1993 treaty, the Nunavut agreement, also contains some limited Inuktitut language provisions.

Most importantly and optimistically, Nunavut is the only province or territory in which an indigenous language is spoken by a majority of the public as their mother tongue.

I come from Igloodik. The Hall Beach DEW line site is a distance just longer than a marathon away. The DEW line, an American military installation built across 10,000 kilometres of the Arctic in two years, served as a strategic military position to warn the U.S. of airborne danger from the then USSR. It was built in the days of no runways or hotels. There are still no ports.

Today, the threats are different. Globalization limits innovation and creativity. I am here today, born and raised 70 kilometres from the Hall Beach DEW line site, to give you an early warning from the distance. Despite the existing protections, Inuktitut is a language at risk. Every year, the number of Inuit language speakers in Nunavut declines by 1%. It is a devastating reality that Inuit cannot access essential programs and services in our own language. Language barriers between Inuit patients and health professionals are a life and death matter long recognized by Inuit, and now in at least one coroner's report.

The 97% Inuit student body in Nunavut is taught by over 75% non-Inuktitut speaking teachers—a virtual death sentence for the language. The people of Inuit Nunangat urgently need a federal language act. The government's initiative in this respect is welcome, and Bill C-91 contains recognition and objectives that NTI supports. In particular, NTI has long sought the positive interpretive principle contained in clause 3, and is pleased with the recognition of section 35 language rights. Unfortunately, these provisions are not enough to save and sustain Inuktitut. The Inuit have offered the government a number of concrete and, we believe, reasonable proposals.

That brings me to NTI's disappointment with the bill, both in terms of process and content. You heard much of this from Natan Obed, President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and it bears repeating. Since 2017, Inuit sought to be constructive partners throughout the legislative process, sharing position papers, drafting a comprehensive Inuktitut bill and showing a willingness to compromise on legislative content.

On the content of the bill, there are a number of central weaknesses, including that the bill does not contain any funding commitments. Rather, references to funding are included in purposes, consultation and future agreement provisions. Unlike Nunavut's Official Languages Act, Bill C-91 contains no actual

rights or duties respecting the delivery of federal services in Inuktitut. The bill does not ensure that essential services and programs required for a healthy Inuit population and a prosperous northern economy, such as education, health and the administration of justice, will be available in Inuktitut where numbers warrant it.

In short, with the greatest respect for the intentions behind it, Bill C-91 is largely a symbolic effort. Symbols are important, but they fall far short of what is needed, and short of what is called for in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report. Our preference is for a stand-alone federal Inuktitut act in recognition of Inuktitut's unique status as the majority language of the territory.

• (1555)

As it stands, C-91 would be considerably improved by the following amendments: recognition of Inuktitut as an original language of Canada and the first language of the majority of Inuit Nunangat residents; a commitment to the delivery of critical federal programs and services in Inuktitut in Inuit Nunangat—to the extent that demand requires, capacity allows and numbers warrant; close collaboration with Inuit bodies in meeting the Government of Canada's commitments under the act; and a commitment to funding that will ensure services comparable to those enjoyed by other Canadians.

I invite you to see that Bill C-91 could be so much more. On the basis of Inuit language rights, reconciliation and our nation's ability to remain innovative, Canada must invest in the future of Inuktitut. This is achievable.

Thank you. I am happy to take questions.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Sorry, we were having interpretation issues.

Thank you.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you.

We're now going to begin our question and answer period.

[*Translation*]

We'll start with Mr. Breton.

Mr. Breton, you have the floor for seven minutes.

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Wasn't Ms. Kabloona going to give a presentation?

The Chair: She's part of the same organization.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Thank you, Madam Chair. I apologize. I thought that she had been added at the end.

I want to thank our guests for joining us today.

I'll start with you, Mr. Jones. At the start of your presentation, you spoke briefly about the co-development process. I want you to elaborate on it. Have you been included in the process? What do you think of the process, which I believe is quite important and quite unique?

[English]

Mr. Roger Jones: We worked in a codevelopment context that perhaps benefited from some earlier work that has taken place between governments. Whether those were elected as Liberal governments or Conservative governments, there have been instances of some joint work and variations on that.

In my view, because I have been involved in other initiatives, this effort was probably my best experience in terms of working in a joint process, but I can only speak for myself and my experience with it. We went from a commitment that was expressed by the Prime Minister in December 2016 about working at developing an indigenous languages act on a codevelopment basis that wasn't prejudged or predetermined.

As I said at the outset, the working relationship did evolve over the course of the past 18 months. For us, the measure of whether this working relationship over the past 18 months did produce what people desired by way of legislative content went a long way towards being able to meet people's expectations. There are challenges, and I'm sure if it were left up to us to draft the bill for you to consider, it probably would look a bit different from this. However, I'm sure there are many elements of this bill that we would also find favour with in terms of exactly how it's laid out, and the contents and the substance of it.

For the most part, since we didn't have a specific road map going into what "codevelopment" meant, we figured it out as we went along and this is where it has brought us.

• (1605)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Breton: Thank you.

Mr. Benjamin, you mentioned some aspects of the bill that could be amended or improved. We don't think that the bill is perfect. Nothing is perfect in this world. In general, do you support the bill? Do you have a positive view of the bill? I couldn't quite grasp whether you or your organization support the bill.

[English]

Mr. Craig Benjamin: We certainly do see it positively at a high level. We do not have the expertise of other organizations, and I'm not in a position to speak for indigenous peoples themselves, obviously, so there's a level of detail around the bill where we would rely on the judgment of others.

The essential framework, as we heard from the president, the recognition in law of a legislative framework for the protection and the promotion of indigenous languages, the recognition that this is a matter of human rights, we see at a high level to be a very positive development.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Breton: Ms. Kotierk, can you tell us more specifically what type of support is needed, whether or not it concerns the bill, to ensure the protection and promotion of your language?

[English]

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: *Qujannamiik.*

I neglected to ask whether or not you had a copy of the text amendments we provided.

The Chair: All the members—

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: I believe we provided it in both English and French, recognizing those are the official languages of this nation. You'll see we're suggesting that some text be included in Bill C-91, and we've numbered them X1 to X4. In addition, we're suggesting an annex related to Inuit languages specifically, so we provided that in written form.

• (1610)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Breton: Okay.

[English]

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: If I may, I can say generally what we're looking for is that there be recognition of Inuit languages as the original language of Inuit Nunangat, that we're expecting to be able to receive essential services in Inuit languages, and we're expecting this would require adequate and equitable funding to be able to provide for that.

[Translation]

The Chair: Your time is up, Mr. Breton.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Now we're going to Mr. Shields for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Jones, you've been with the process as you described it, so I have an idea you're fairly familiar with the bill. We've heard in proposed subclause 24(3) some concerns about Statistics Canada and Library and Archives Canada. Do you have an opinion on what you may have heard from others on that particular piece of the legislation?

Mr. Roger Jones: In the course of our engagements, people expressed concern about this kind of activity and measure being lodged outside their own communities. I believe it stems from the fact that people believe the languages are theirs, and if there's going to be recording, archiving and preservation it should be done by them. There is provision for that with respect to the purposes of the act, which says part of it relates to being able to support the efforts of indigenous peoples to create technological tools, educational materials and permanent records of indigenous languages, including audio and video recordings of fluent speakers, and so on.

The desire is for indigenous peoples to be able to do this themselves. There is capacity out there for people to do this themselves, so rather than place it in the hands of external bodies, like Library and Archives Canada, why not ensure that these measures are in the hands of the indigenous peoples themselves who own these languages?

Mr. Martin Shields: Where did this clause come from?

Mr. Roger Jones: I think the clause comes from the fact that if there are indigenous parties or indigenous groups or communities out there who would like the support from external entities that perhaps they can ask them to help, which is really a capacity-building measure, as I would understand it.

Mr. Martin Shields: If there was wording in that clause for facilitation where needed, would it strengthen that clause to what is needed?

Mr. Roger Jones: Clarity is always useful, which is what I spoke to in implementation. We would prefer clarity to the extent it can be produced in the bill.

Mr. Martin Shields: Then in a sense that's one of the challenges with it, getting that clarity into that section, because it has been brought up a number of times.

Mr. Roger Jones: Yes, and I can totally affirm that this was a cause for concern expressed by our people.

Mr. Martin Shields: I understand what you're saying about facilitation when needed. That expertise might be of use in some places, while others already have it.

Mr. Roger Jones: Yes.

Mr. Martin Shields: Okay, good.

Another issue that has come up is under clause 25 or 26, where there's a list—"Indigenous government or other Indigenous governing body, an Indigenous organization or the Government of Canada". Some say that might not have been representative of the groups out there. Have you any thoughts on that?

Mr. Roger Jones: Yes, we did encounter in the engagements the views that, for instance, traditional governments may not be reflected in the language. We heard that view, that the legislation should be expansive in terms of contemplating with whom governments should engage, let's say with respect to matters of funding. Some communities believed they wanted to do this on a nation basis versus an individual community basis. At best, our reply to them was that the legislation should be flexible in being able to accommodate that. Now, does this language do that? That's the big question, right?

• (1615)

Mr. Martin Shields: Yes.

Mr. Roger Jones: You will note that in the definitions section perhaps the definition of "Indigenous government" isn't broad enough for people's liking. I'm sure they would prefer to see that reflected in the legislation as well, the recognition of traditional governments as they exist.

Mr. Martin Shields: I think that clause will be a challenge, in the sense of further defining it, and it could slow the process down. I hope not.

For the president of Nunavut Tunngavik, you mentioned funding, and you said "adequate", but then you said "equitable". In this piece of legislation it says "adequate". You used a different word. Why?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: In my view, this legislation as it's currently presented is merely creating a commissioner's office. It's not explicitly said, but there's probably a cap on the amount of money that will be provided to the commissioner's office. Then the expectation that I foresee is that indigenous groups who speak different indigenous languages will be fighting for the same pot of

money, rather than looking at it in a way of asking how we provide services in an indigenous language to the population, to serve it, similar to the way in which French minority language speakers are provided that funding.

I guess in Nunavut, where the majority of the population speaks Inuktitut as their first language—and it's the only jurisdiction in Canada where there's a homogenous indigenous population of which 70% speak their mother language, Inuktitut—the expectation is that we should be able to get essential services in education, in justice and in health in Inuit languages.

Mr. Martin Shields: I got that, but you used a different word, and you don't have that in your amendments. You didn't use "equitable".

The Chair: Sorry, you are out of time.

I just wanted to let everyone know what you're received. The amendments were distributed by email, but the witnesses were kind enough to bring paper copies, so you have paper copies in front of you as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Nantel, you have the floor for seven minutes.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

I'll speak English; no worries.

First, thank you all, of course, for being here. Please allow me to express that I am not at all a specialist in first nations, Métis and Inuit questions, but I hope all Canada deeply wants to answer all the TRC recommendations. We are talking here about a bill that clearly... Actually, I shouldn't say "clearly"; I should simply ask. Isn't this bill about the actions to take so as not to lose first nations, Métis and Inuit first languages? As you say, Inuktitut remains super-spoken. It's a bit out of scope. You would need a different bill. Am I right to say that? It's not the same at all.

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: I don't think we would necessarily need a different bill. One of the things that we advocated right from the outset was to have our own Inuktitut language bill. When we realized that the federal government was going to have an indigenous language bill, we said, "Okay, we're reasonable people. We're going to work with this process, and we're going to advocate for Inuit specific provisions in there."

I think, even if there was an omnibus indigenous language bill, there are ways to address the Inuit concerns. I think that's what we've been proactively trying to approach in that manner.

I want to say, to Martin Shields' question, why I used a different word.

In the amendments, we're using "comparable" as the language. I know in English there's a word "synonym". When I speak English, I think "comparable" and "equitable" are similar in the sense of what they mean. I know in Inuktitut, when we speak, we can use many different words for similar meanings, so I don't know what the hang-up is about that.

I just want to say the point is, we expect to be able to receive equitable, comparable services as other Canadians. Currently we do not, even though we are Canadians in Nunavut.

• (1620)

Mr. Pierre Nantel: That's a good clarification.

Especially in this case, to me it speaks volumes. You come and say you want to have services in the language of the majority, which makes total sense. But on the other hand, we're talking about all these other languages that are being lost to English, mostly, maybe French sometimes in Quebec, but mostly to English. To me it's like we're talking about totally opposite situations.

You are saying we have a majority language, and it's surely not being lost. Well, that's great. We value that, and we should encourage it and give you proper services in that language, but the other two sides are saying that they are losing their languages. This opposition is fascinating me.

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: If I may, I want to clarify. I came to say I am here with a warning bell. Inuktitut is being lost.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Is it?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: At the rate of 1% per year in Nunavut, Inuktitut is being lost. I have seen it personally in my own family. I am the oldest of seven children. The older members of my family speak Inuktitut. My younger siblings don't.

Two years ago, I went to the homeland of my father. He took us where he grew up, not in the community, on the land. He said to me, "Aluki, come with me so you can be my interpreter." Then he sighed and said very quietly to my own children...

When I hear and talk about language legislation, it is a matter of life and death when people are unable to get services in the health system. It is being killed by the school system when 75% of the teachers are non-Inuktitut speaking teachers in our schools. When there are 43 schools, one school is a French school funded by the federal government.

We wonder why Inuit are not as bitter or as angry as they should be when they see the inequities in their homelands where their children are being taught in English.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Is this...?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: To me, it's not that we're safe. I have always been so fearful that this language legislation would make assumptions that Inuktitut is safe, because we know it's declining.

If we don't do something, we will be like any other indigenous language across this nation. I do not want to see that.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: I understand.

This is why to you the funding remains a very—

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: Absolutely.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: —shady spot.

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: It is absolutely necessary that Inuit languages are supported and funded in an equitable and comparable fashion in Inuit Nunangat, and particularly, as I advocate for Nunavut, that Inuit in Nunavut are able to have the dignity and get the services that they require and not rely on people who are bilingual in an informal way

to ask us when they're in a situation and need us to informally provide interpretation services.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Hasn't there very recently been a death at sea that involved a misunderstanding between the Coast Guard and—

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: There are many examples. There are examples from the Coast Guard. There are examples of tuberculosis patients who have not received services and have died. People who are living say language was a factor in it.

There are many examples where we can point to Inuit not receiving the services that they should be able to receive because they are unable to understand clearly.

I could see all of you having difficulty and scrambling when I was speaking Inuktitut, because the interpretation service wasn't that great, but I want you to know that every single day that is the reality of us as Inuit living in Canada as Canadians.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Yes. I understand.

You evoked three main points recognizing Inuktitut as an original language of Canada. The word "original" is very specific. You evoked the majority who speak the language. You talked about the service offering, which we just spoke about.

There's also a third point in your document that I'm trying to find here. A key term is "close collaboration". I don't know what level that's at.

• (1625)

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: It's close collaboration with Inuit organizations. When I'm speaking about that, I'm thinking specifically in the context of Nunavut. Currently, there are language agreements that are agreed to by the territorial public government and the federal government, and Inuit organizations are not involved in that. Currently, there's one for French languages and one for Inuit languages. French languages get 40 times more than Inuit languages, per capita, when we're looking at it within Nunavut.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Per capita.

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: We see the inequity of that.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Okay.

The Chair: We will now be going to Mr. Hogg for the final seven minutes.

Mr. Gordie Hogg (South Surrey—White Rock, Lib.): Thank you. I will be sharing a couple of minutes with Mr. Vandal.

Thank you very much for your passionate and informed comments.

Mr. Jones, you talked about looking at how the legislation should be broken down. First, though, I should make the same disclaimer that Mr. Nantel and others made. I'm not an expert in languages. As we proceed, it will become quickly apparent I'm not an expert in anything.

One of the issues in the development of legislation is how much is in the value statements, how much is specific, and how much you get to move around and be flexible with. Some people are arguing that it's a very positive thing. Some people are saying that it's a negative. Some people want to have a much more concrete sense in it. When you developed the 12 principles you talked about, how did you incorporate that or triage that into a system that said this is what should be contained in the legislation and this is what should be contained in policy or regulations or something? Can you tell me a little bit about how your principles reflected that?

Mr. Roger Jones: I can only speak to the AFN's experience on this. We were instructed to seek inclusion in the legislation—these essential 11 principles that I know were shared with you last week by the national chief—so the objective for us was to try to get them into the main body. Often the response was, well, we could put that in the preamble. But our preference was to try to get it into the main body, because that's where people wanted to see it. In the course of our engagements, people did understand the difference between putting words in the preamble versus the body versus regulations. All of our efforts were directed at trying to get as many of our principles as we could within the body.

At the same time, though, people did say that less is better in terms of the length of the bill. For instance, if you look at this bill, clauses 31 to 42 talk about the financial management of the indigenous languages commissioner. That's not anything that people generally concern themselves about, yet it's five pages in the bill. We encouraged maybe putting that in regulations or in a schedule or in an annex or something. It's a distraction for people, quite frankly, because all of a sudden people think it is about the indigenous languages commissioner rather than about what their priorities are.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Some of the witnesses before us here have said that when you put it in legislation, it's concretized, and things change so quickly, you might not want to lose that flexibility. I guess that's what you're suggesting with respect to that.

Another issue that the witnesses have had varying points of view on is about the office of the commissioner and directors. How should they be appointed? Some witnesses have argued that they should be appointed geographically as opposed to being representative, i.e., Inuit, Métis, first nations. Should they be broken down in that fashion or geographically? Do you have a position with respect to that, or is that something you have explored?

• (1630)

Mr. Roger Jones: Well, part of the discussion relating to the commissioner's office was mostly with respect to the mandate. What's its purpose? How do you ensure that the purpose of the office is actually going to be realized? At times we talked about business lines as being important in ensuring that the office was going to be effective. In terms of mandate, you could say that the office's most important job, first of all, is oversight, making sure that the government is living up to the intentions of the bill.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: I agree with that part.

Mr. Roger Jones: That's an important business line. Then you get into the area of promotion. Then you get into the area of complaints investigation. Some of that, I believe, is reflected in the potential organization, but that's not the be-all and end-all at this point. It says “up to”.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Thank you.

Aluki, you made the comment that the appointee in the commissioner's office just didn't mean anything except for just being appointed. How would you see the operations of this rolling out? How would you separate that? You talked a bit about perhaps having your own legislation. Is that the only way that it would work, or is there some way to ensure that the commissioner's office did carry out the tasks? If they were not made explicit, if they were left, as Mr. Jones suggested, or Mr. Benjamin, who talked about values only, how would you see that operating? Would that function in a way that made sense to you?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: I've looked through the legislation. My fear about the creation of a commissioner's office is that it's symbolic. It does not help a 10-year-old Inuktitut-speaking student when they go into the school. I don't know how it's going to transform the way in which the federal government is protecting and ensuring indigenous languages thrive. It seems like a bureaucratic process that is a way for the federal government to pat itself on the back and say, “We are actually doing something for indigenous languages.”

Mr. Gordie Hogg: How would you put that in there? Would you have measurables? “The federal government must do this”, is that the phrasing you would use?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: I think it's important that there be objective standards against which indigenous languages can be measured. In terms of Nunavut and Inuit languages, when I talk about the standards of services and the essential services in which I think Inuktitut and Inuit should be receiving services, that's where I expect the commissioner's office would be helpful, in that area. But in terms of providing reports to the Government of Canada and saying, “This is how we spent money on activities”, I don't think that's a useful exercise.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Thank you.

Apparently, my time has run out. Sorry, Dan.

The Chair: That is all our time for this first panel. I want to thank all of you for providing us with your testimony and for your assistance. We are going to be suspending briefly while we set up the next panel. Thank you.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1640)

The Chair: We are starting again. I would like to give a quick shout-out before we get started. There were a whole bunch of students in the room.

Hello. It's great to see all of you here. They're at Algonquin College, part of Nunavut Sivuniksavut, I believe, which is the future of Nunavut. Thank you for coming.

We are now on our second panel. We have Karon Shmon from the Gabriel Dumont Institute and we have Jocelyn Formsma and Christopher Sheppard from the National Association of Friendship Centres.

We will begin with Karon Shmon.

Ms. Karon Shmon (Director of Publishing, Culture and Heritage, Gabriel Dumont Institute): Good afternoon. I'd like to acknowledge that we're meeting on unceded Algonquin territory, and I want to thank the committee for allowing me this opportunity to speak with you today.

I'm probably going to be a lot different from what I just heard in the last panel. I think it was a good opportunity for me to hear what was said.

I'll give you some background on the Gabriel Dumont Institute. We are a Métis post-secondary and cultural organization. We're based in Saskatchewan and we are considered to be the cultural and education arm of the Métis Nation—Saskatchewan.

In 1976, our elders were at a cultural conference and they decided that the only way our culture, history and language were going to be preserved and then told from our own perspective was if we formed an institute of our own. By 1980, the Gabriel Dumont Institute was founded based on that recommendation from the elders and the others at the cultural conference.

In 2020, we will celebrate our 40th year. On the education and training side, it's the design and development and delivery of educational programs for Métis. This was, I think, the beginning of what we would call our Métis affirmative action program. We're not asking anyone to lower the bar. We're asking to get our people to the bar so that they can be employed and contribute as others have and do.

The flagship program for that was Métis teacher education. Over those 40 years, we've graduated over 400 Métis teachers, and they're making a huge difference in the education system. They're almost all based in provincial schools. Initially, it was to show Métis children that they could become teachers if they wanted to, but it has gone beyond that to show the capability of Métis people as educational leaders and to ensure that Métis content, perspectives and ways of knowing are a part of the curricula. They are mandated to be part of the curricula but how they are delivered and whether they are delivered is spotty. That's that story.

Then on the culture and history arm, we have the world's largest repository of Métis-specific items in the Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture. It is accessed about 40,000 times a month by places all over the world. That's unique visits, not repeat visits. We're generating interest not just in Saskatchewan but across Canada as well.

Regarding our language, it's an inextricable part of our culture and heritage and yet it's in peril right now. The Métis nation is original to Canada. There's no other place that it was formed first, and that also goes for our language, Michif, which predates Confederation. As you're probably well aware, we called ourselves the new nation, and we had quite a huge role in the fur trade. We were the middlemen—and, I always like to add, the middle women—of the fur trade because those alliances were good business practice. But they were also the birth of the Métis nation, because our people could both liaise and make familial connections with both first nations and the Europeans who were doing business at the time.

Then as time went on, we morphed into our own culture and developed our own language. That's Michif and it's unique. It hadn't

existed previously. Some of the technologies and ways of doing things were unique to the Métis as well.

We consider people like Louis Riel to be nation builders, because he was very instrumental in making Canada. Then of course after the first resistance in 1869-1870 and then the big one in 1885, Métis lost that battle but we won the rights battle. Métis went into hiding because it was very dangerous to identify as a Métis person after that. You were pretty much guaranteeing that you would be unemployed and perhaps further persecuted for being Métis.

We were not recognized by the government in any way. Our people were forced to disperse, because again, for the second time, we were kicked off our lands and told to go elsewhere. Then I think most of you would be familiar with the big rip-off of the scrip process. That was a process for getting compensation for leaving those lands, but there were so many speculators around at the time who took advantage of that that the Métis people didn't get the land or compensation and were dispersed.

●(1645)

I consider that one of the reasons our language, Michif, is in such peril at this time.

It is an awful tragedy that first nations were relegated to less than 1% of the land base of Canada and needed a pass to leave, but I do envy the fact that they were congregated into a spot where their language could remain intact until more recently. Their languages were used in the community and passed from generation to generation.

As the Métis dispersed, not only were people spread out and not able to stay in those strong family groupings, but it was something that you hid. There are oral stories of our people hiding bannock and of not speaking the language when others were present, so we also got the messaging in mainstream schooling that our language and culture were of no importance, and again, we were being taught from the historical perspectives of non-indigenous authors. We'd have to hear about the crazy rebel Louis Riel, how he rebelled against the Government of Canada and how the founding fathers were the great heroes of Canada.

Those were hard messages to choke down at the time, and then a pan-indigenous approach to who the indigenous peoples of Canada are. I'm not a fan of that term. I consider it a lazy throwback to the term "native" or even "aboriginal" in that it's not distinctions-based. If the average person, the average Canadian, were surveyed, if you asked them what "indigenous" means, they would say "first nations". We get memos with such things on them as "indigenous and Métis". We are indigenous people.

We finally were recognized, but we're way behind. After the efforts of Métis Harry Daniels, who took the Canadian government to court, we were recognized in the Constitution Act of 1982, under section 35, so it has not even been 40 years since we've had any formal recognition.

More recently, in 2016, the Daniels decision was another victory, initiated by Harry Daniels, in which the federal government agreed that they should have taken responsibility for the Métis as they did for the Inuit and the first nations.

Therefore, in terms of those issues, of us having to go underground, of being dispersed and of having mainstream schooling not affirm who we are as an indigenous people and then of no value for us to keep our languages.... I never say we “lost” them; I say they were “taken”, because of those factors.

The recent exhibition by Library and Archives Canada that calls the Métis “Hiding in Plain Sight” is fairly accurately titled, because we have been there all along. It's just that we haven't been recognized as being there, so we're hoping to change all of that.

Michif is “critically endangered”, and that's not my term. That's a United Nations term. There's a matrix they use to identify what kind of danger a language is in, and that is the worst place for it to be. “Extinct” is zero speakers, but when you have only the grandparent generation speaking the language and their children and grandchildren do not speak the language, that's a critical factor.

They are dispersed, so they're not even living with people or within a community where they can practise the language, so that is another factor.

•(1650)

The Chair: Ms. Shmon, I'm really sorry. I've let you go a little over the time allotted. If you could try to wrap it up, that would be great.

Ms. Karon Shmon: Okay.

I'm here to advocate for the bill to be passed. The majority of speakers are in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Manitoba has seen a decline in the last decade of 50% of its Michif speakers, and we're nearing that in Saskatchewan. Those who speak the language are all between 65 and 85 years old, so it's time that we get on it or we will lose our language.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to the National Association of Friendship Centres, please.

Ms. Jocelyn Formsma (Executive Director, National Association of Friendship Centres): Thank you very much.

Before we begin our presentation, we'd also like to acknowledge the unceded Algonquin territory on which we are meeting today.

My name is Jocelyn Formsma and I am the Executive Director of the National Association of Friendship Centres.

[Witness spoke in Cree]

[English]

I'm from Moose Cree First Nation.

Mr. Christopher Sheppard (Board President, National Association of Friendship Centres): Good day.

My name is Christopher Sheppard. I'm the President of the National Association of Friendship Centres. I'm an Inuk. I am a beneficiary of the Nunatsiavut government in Labrador.

We have submitted two copies of both French and English versions of the NAFC discussion paper entitled “Our Languages,

Our Stories: Towards the Revitalization and Retention of Indigenous Languages in Urban Environments”.

I will start with some information about the NAFC.

The National Association of Friendship Centres is a network of over 100 members that are friendship centres and six members that are provincial and territorial associations from coast to coast to coast. Friendship centres are Canada's most significant off-reserve, indigenous, civil society network service delivery infrastructure and are the primary providers of culturally relevant programs for indigenous people living in urban environments.

For over 70 years, friendship centres have facilitated the transition of indigenous people from rural, remote and reserve life to an urban environment, and they increasingly support those who were born and raised in the urban environment. For many indigenous people, friendship centres are the first and main point of contact to find community, receive support and obtain referrals to culturally based socio-economic programs and services, which include indigenous language programs.

As NAFC president, I reported on May 9, 2018 to the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples that in 2015 alone, NAFC friendship centres saw over 2.3 million client contacts, and provided over 1,800 different programs and services in many areas, including language.

For example, at First Light St. John's Friendship Centre, there is language programming in Mi'kmaq offered to anyone in the community. The classrooms and conversations were also recorded and broadcast, and made available through Webex so that anyone could join in person or online. The proposal we initially put forward was for three indigenous languages—Mi'kmaq, Inuktitut and Innu-aimun. However, it seemed like it was too complex for the department to understand the delivery of three indigenous languages, so they asked us to scale it to one.

Under One Sky Friendship Centre in Fredericton has a “take it outside” head start project that takes children on the land to learn Maliseet in all seasons. The Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre in Halifax is a partner in an indigenous-centred training program that promotes bringing language and culture into early childhood education. Native Montréal has for three years held free weekly language classes in Innu, Cree, Anishinawbemowin, Atikamekw, Wendat and Inuktitut for both children and adults. The Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary offers Cree, Michif and Blackfoot classes funded by the province, and the Canadian Native Friendship Centre in Edmonton provides Cree classes.

The Dauphin Friendship Centre provided Michif language, and the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres received \$6 million for language programming under the provincial government.

The NAFC is here to speak about Bill C-91, because we are in it right now. We are providing language programming, and we will continue to do it because we are accountable to the indigenous communities that own and operate our centres on shoestring budgets.

Since 1972, the NAFC has built this deep, grass-rooted foundation that forms the very fabric of the urban indigenous population in Canada. We have leadership and a national network that reaches deep into urban indigenous communities that are asking for support for further use and revitalization of indigenous languages.

Urban indigenous people hold a strong connection to their identity while navigating ways to maintain cultural connections outside of their communities. This reality of our urban indigenous issues is ignored or forgotten. This is our critical hour to ensure the urban indigenous voice is heard and upheld in the establishment of Bill C-91, and respecting indigenous languages includes respecting where indigenous language is needed, and this includes Canada's urban landscape.

With the staggering increase of over 60% in the urban indigenous population in just 10 years, it is clear that a national mandate to revitalize indigenous languages must include urban indigenous communities.

● (1655)

Ms. Jocelyn Formsma: I'll speak a little bit to what's in our language discussion paper and some of our review of Bill C-91, before we wrap up for questions.

In March 2018, the NAFC held a two-day, "Our Languages, Our Stories" forum, with representation from all parts of Canada, to discuss and contribute input into the development of indigenous language legislation; in particular, to discuss the urban perspective on the state of indigenous languages.

There were several recommendations and highlights from the gathering that directly speak to the intent of Bill C-91. Participants shared the challenge of learning their language as a second language and the importance of immersive language learning. To quote the discussion paper:

...it must be incorporated into every aspect of peoples' lives in a wholistic way and there must be opportunities to speak the language, at every age, through the cycle of life.

Strong support was expressed for friendship centres themselves acting as central hubs for language revitalization, including providing safe and culturally relevant spaces for language learning.

This gathering provided further affirmation of how proud indigenous people are of their languages and ways of knowing and being. The youth shared how integral language is to their pride and understanding of where they come from.

Our recommendations were to create a national institute of indigenous languages; conduct a national indigenous languages needs assessment and research project; advocate to make all indigenous languages official languages in Canada; support indigenous language signage in urban centres across Canada; establish a federal department of indigenous languages and education; and support friendship centres to be indigenous language learning hubs.

I'll now speak to some of the clauses in Bill C-91 that affect friendship centres and urban indigenous communities.

Reflected in Bill C-91 is the commitment to providing adequate, sustainable and long-term funding for the reclamation, revitalization,

maintenance and strengthening of indigenous languages. The Government of Canada realizes indigenous peoples are best placed to take the leading role in reclaiming, revitalizing, maintaining and strengthening indigenous languages.

Friendship centres are indigenous-owned and -operated civil society organizations, operating in urban settings. This is an opportunity to draw upon the extensive NAFC network and expertise in program delivery throughout Canada. There are friendship centres in every province and territory, except for P.E.I., and each of them provides direct services to reach the urban indigenous population.

The definition of "Indigenous organization" in the bill is unclear as to whether friendship centres are considered. "Indigenous organization" is defined as an "entity that represents the interests of an indigenous group". Friendship centres do not claim to represent the interests of any one indigenous group or its members. In fact, we represent an urban perspective and serve all indigenous groups and all members, whether they are recognized by their communities or not.

What about indigenous media organizations? Many indigenous communication organizations that have provided radio and television in indigenous languages for decades are nowhere reflected in the act.

Under the definition of "Indigenous peoples", there is reference to subsection 35(2), which is "Indian, Inuit and Métis". The NAFC would encourage that the definition be expanded to ensure the inclusion of all indigenous people, including non-status Indians and non-beneficiary Inuit, and be clear about what is meant by Métis. Indigenous language revitalization should not be tied to a political affiliation.

Under paragraph 5(b)(iii), under the "Purposes of Act", it mentions supporting indigenous peoples to "create technological tools, educational materials and permanent records of Indigenous languages". The NAFC would like to encourage that the purposes be expanded to support the technological tools, educational materials and permanent records that have already been developed. There are indigenous organizations that have databases, tapes, documents, materials and apps that have already been developed.

There are indigenous media organizations that have worked for decades and have reels of language material. If they were able to access funding and support, they would be able to mobilize and, for example, digitize these materials and make them more readily available to the public and indigenous communities and organizations, such as friendship centres.

● (1700)

The Chair: I'm just checking in, because I've let you go over by a little bit. I know that you're right in the heart of it. I don't know how much more you have.

Ms. Jocelyn Formsma: I have one more point, and then it's our conclusion. We can forgo our conclusion.

The Chair: If you just go to your one more point, that's fine.

Ms. Jocelyn Formsma: Through Bill C-91, a commissioner position will lead the implementation and oversight. What is not clear is how it will be rolled out into Canada. It lacks assurance of accountability to indigenous people.

This gap leads to the potential implications for key stakeholders in the community, including friendship centres. NAFC will want to see direct measures clearly outlined to connect impacts of Bill C-91 to the urban indigenous population, including equitable access to resources.

Further, we recommend that the commissioner and three directors be given a special mandate to consider language revitalization within urban indigenous communities, or establish a fourth director whose mandate would be solely focused on urban perspectives.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go directly to questions and answers, beginning with Mr. Vandal, for seven minutes.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Thank you very much to both of you for your presentations. They were very good presentations.

I'll start with Karon.

What, in your opinion, are the greatest challenges in protecting and promoting the Michif language?

Ms. Karon Shmon: I think the greatest challenge is the lack of speakers and the age of the speakers, because we can't use some of the strategies of other indigenous peoples where they have language nests or where they have people of teaching age who can spend all day with students.

Another great challenge is how quickly can we “capture a bank and cash the language” before we lose all of the speakers, because we're really looking at a critical timing element as being the greatest challenge.

Mr. Dan Vandal: If I want to learn Michif, are there any schools or language institutes other than Gabriel Dumont Institute, which I know of?

Ms. Karon Shmon: The Louis Riel Institute in Winnipeg is doing a lot as well. We have an app in two different Michif languages, which is available for both android and Mac.

We have a lot of online tools.

We know technology will be a big helper, given the low number of speakers and the lack of proximity for them to collaborate.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Is there anything else across Canada?

Ms. Karon Shmon: Yes, there are different groups. I know Kelowna has a group that is doing some Michif language work. There are two schools in Saskatoon that have Métis-focused schools that implement Michif.

• (1705)

Mr. Dan Vandal: Good.

Ms. Karon Shmon: But again, they're doing it with non-Michif speakers who are interested in Michif.

Mr. Dan Vandal: If this bill passes, there is a budget, and you are able to access some support from the federal government, where would it go?

Ms. Karon Shmon: I think a big portion of it would have to go into this language banking. And the second part would be the creation of resources, bringing the speakers together because some of the phrases and terminology used are things that people have forgotten about. If you bring the speakers together they say, I remember hearing that. You'll find out that they call something a different term in different communities, but when they get together they remember them. So it's both depth and breadth that we're looking for in conserving the language.

A second arm of that would be in language teacher development. We have the Métis teacher programs already. Many of them are interested in becoming Michif language teachers.

The U of S has a Michif language certificate in the making.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Right.

And you did say “language banking”?

Ms. Karon Shmon: Yes, it just means preserving it because if we lose them, we'll have something to go back to.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I understand.

Jocelyn and Christopher, you mentioned a number of language programs in your friendship centres across the country. There was a lot of information very quickly.

Do you have the approximate number of language programs, and is there any particular model or practice that stands out for its results or its quality?

Ms. Jocelyn Formsma: I wouldn't say we have an accurate sense of how many language programs are operating within friendship centres. These are just the ones that we know about.

We do capture the data. However, on a separate issue we haven't been able to mobilize the data that we collect from friendship centres to be able to get a good sense of where our programming is.

I couldn't give you a number of how many friendship centres there are. We just know that they're doing it and where they're getting the funding for it, we're not sure. For example, in Montreal they have been offering these language classes for a number of years for a number of different languages. It's not clear to us where the funding is coming from. I don't think it would be from the friendship centre core programming, but it's a possibility.

We know in some cases that the provincial governments are providing some funds to support indigenous languages.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Okay.

Again, let's assume this bill passes and there is a budget attached to the bill. If you had access to some program support, what would be the priority for the friendship centres?

Ms. Jocelyn Formsma: Friendship centres offer so many different kinds of programming across the country that it's hard to say which friendship centre would be able to provide what. We have alternative high schools, we have aboriginal head start programs, day cares, youth programming, parental programs, mother and child programs, prenatal programs. Any one of these programs could potentially be a point for language learning. Some of them could just offer the weekly classes and find local individuals to provide those language classes.

A number of technological apps and websites have been developed. Potentially, the friendship centres could draw on what has already been developed and use people just to have more conversation. The fear I have with technology is that while it's good to develop the technology, you still need people talking to each other in order to revitalize a language.

I'm not sure what it would look like, but I know that we could get the programming pretty quickly out to communities if we were able to have a national program.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I know through our friendship that you're also the chairperson of the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network. It has indigenous language programming several hours a week—I'm not sure how many anymore. I know you touched on it in your presentation, but could you talk about the role of media—television and radio—not only in promoting indigenous languages, but as places where people can actually hear languages?

The Chair: I would ask you to answer in a very short time.

Ms. Jocelyn Formsma: The role of indigenous media is so important, and I haven't seen it reflected in this act. Television and radio have been used for decades across Canada, especially in the north, to not just utilize the language but to get essential information across. You can look at Wawatay, across northern Ontario, or you can look at the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation in Iqaluit. These organizations are so essential to getting the language out there and having people hear it every single day. You can think about the children's programming that the Inuit societies or the northern societies have created so that children are learning how to speak the language at very young ages.

I think those examples ought to be reviewed and considered within this bill, if you're thinking of any additions or amendments.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Mr. Yurdiga for seven minutes, please.

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank everyone for coming here today. Your testimony is very important.

I'd like to say that I'm very impressed by the native friendship centres in my riding and also by your organization. I have three, one in each of Fort McMurray, Lac La Biche and Cold Lake. I'm still amazed by how much they do with so little budget. Obviously, our friendship centres serve first nations and Métis within my communities.

How do you foresee the friendship centres being involved in preserving...for example in my area it would be Michif, and Cree possibly? How do you foresee yourselves, moving forward, if a program were to come out?

Jocelyn or Christopher.

Mr. Christopher Sheppard: I would really just look at it in the same light that I look at the way friendship centres cultivated and kept culture as a whole going in urban centres. There are friendship centres that were entrusted with many cultural practices over the last 70 years, and there are examples of urban pow-wows and urban ceremony. There are examples of centres that created cultural programming so that it would remain intact, programming that was shared with their home communities after.

Friendship centres were really the culmination of indigenous people wanting to keep their cultures alive even after they transitioned, and now that includes languages, whether it's by learning them, revitalizing them or finding innovative ways to maintain them.

We looked at Webex. The reason for Webex wasn't just to record; it was literally so that you could have a language teacher anywhere. If we couldn't get a Mi'kmaq teacher in St. John's at the time, we could find a place for them to go and teach a class from wherever we could find them. It's good to have your conversations in person, but if you could have them through a screen, even....

For us, centres have provided the space for a very long time for indigenous culture, and I think with language they offer the network and the infrastructure that exists today.

Ms. Jocelyn Formsma: I will add quickly that in our report the participants foresaw that friendship centres and the NAFC could be a central repository for materials, programs and curriculums. We could hold things at our national office that have already been developed and be able to distribute them. If we had a request from a local friendship centre, we could share what we have within that repository. That's in the report we submitted to the committee.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you.

Karon, we have two sets of Métis. We have the settlement, which is land-based, and then we have the Métis who are intertwined in the rural and urban centres, and they don't have a land base.

When we're talking about the Métis, in my mind there are two separate types of infrastructure. We have the settlement and the urban thing. Have you ever worked with the settlements? They have infrastructure in place. They have schools within their land mass. They have certain advantages.

Ms. Karon Shmon: I know they order our resources, but I can't say we've worked with them directly.

• (1715)

Mr. David Yurdiga: Okay.

Ms. Karon Shmon: The Michif in Saskatchewan is what we're calling "northern Michif", and it's very heavily based on Cree. The one that's critically endangered is what we call "heritage Michif", which is the original language from which the other Michifs evolved.

I envy the settlements for having that close community, with not only the proximity to sustain their language but also an infrastructure that enabled them to provide it. Also, once you have a majority situation in the school, it's a lot easier to leverage the support for Michif language inclusion all across Saskatchewan. It's a Métis community, so it's taught every day in the school, and the teachers are Michif speakers as well. Again, that's northern Michif, and it's primarily Cree.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Every region has a different type of...

Ms. Karon Shmon: Yes, and we're calling them all languages. No one wants to think of their language as a dialect, so we call them "Michif languages". Three are spoken in Saskatchewan. The other one is Michif French, which is almost all French.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you.

I know a lot of Métis organizations have access to the digital platform more so than some of these settlements, which have difficulty even getting Internet service. They get basic, but it's really hard to function.

Moving forward, how important do you believe it is to have access to adequate cell coverage or Internet coverage? The friendship group mentioned that's a platform you use quite often, and it's very successful. Do you know any communities struggling to access indigenous programs because of their location?

Ms. Karon Shmon: Yes, we do. For the last 15 years, we've been making... All the children's books are translated into Michif and English, and we include a CD that has the audio of the text in both Michif and English. If you're in a situation where you're remote and you don't have access, then you can at least use those resources so you can still hear it.

I was at a different meeting today, where they talked about an e-book that can be downloaded so it appears you're online but you're not really. You can download it so you could use it anywhere, and I think this is where technology is going.

Of course, if you could be hooked up and have interactive lessons and teaching, I think that would be the ideal scenario.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you.

The Chair: That takes you to the end of your time.

[Translation]

We'll now move on to Mr. Nantel for seven minutes.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you, all, for coming.

I should speak French on principle, given what we're studying here.

[Translation]

I have a big question for the three of you. What do you think about the "interference" or contribution of provinces when it comes to

languages, since they have jurisdiction over education, and in Quebec, jurisdiction over language?

What's your position on the role of the provinces referred to in the bill?

[English]

Ms. Karon Shmon: I think we have to respect the two official languages. For the Métis, because we are in provincial schools... In each of the provinces in which Michif is a language of the Métis, I would say that the provincial ministry of education would collaborate with the Métis and be on side with it.

If it had any federal funding... The first nations get their funding federally, and then the provinces set the curriculum. I think there could be some issues there, but if everybody has the same objective—that indigenous languages should be revitalized—I think it could be worked out.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Ms. Formsma, do you have anything to add?

[English]

Ms. Jocelyn Formsma: I learned the only Cree that I know in elementary school. When I was a child in Moosonee—still an urban setting where there's a friendship centre—they had it as part of the regular curriculum. I hear they don't offer Cree as part of the regular curriculum. Also, it was an elective in my high school. When we went to high school, we had the choice to learn either Cree or French. Then I wasn't reintroduced to my language in a formal way until university, and it was an elective course. The only reason the professor was there was to pay for his flying lessons, as he told us on the first day. It wasn't a regular part of the curriculum.

I think that the involvement of provinces is huge. Especially in urban communities, offering language within the school system is essential and important. For a lot of the communities in Quebec, bilingual means French and either Cree, or Innu or Atikamekw. It's not French and English. For the francophone urban indigenous, the language piece is very important—to keep speaking and to keep using it—even if they're not living in their home community.

• (1720)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: During a visit to Kahnawake, Chief Norton showed us a Mohawk language maintenance program that was very important to him. It was a huge process. If I remember correctly, people needed to spend so much time relearning the Mohawk language that it was impossible for them to work full time while doing so.

Certainly resources are required to achieve something, and there's no budget for the act respecting Indigenous languages. I imagine that this uncertainty regarding funding isn't very reassuring.

[English]

Ms. Jocelyn Formsma: Not yet.

Mr. Christopher Sheppard: It's interesting. Sometimes it's hard to pinpoint where money is coming from for some of these friendship centre programs that do language learning. I just happen to be very close with the executive director from Native Montréal. He does over five indigenous languages with \$100,000. Can you imagine a university delivering a language program, or a portion of one, for \$100,000? That expectation would never be put on somebody, but Native Montréal works extremely hard to find five different indigenous language instructors to be available every week.

They moved into a new space and it wasn't enough space for their language classes. You can imagine that expecting anyone to do that for \$100,000 is not really respecting indigenous languages.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: That's right.

If I'm not mistaken, in the friendship centre in Montreal there are up to 10 or 12 first nations.

Mr. Christopher Sheppard: They're from everywhere.

If you look at our centres, you have them in metropolises, really. In Montreal, you have the different first nations, you have people from other countries and you have Inuit people who go there. You have these multitudes of indigenous people from multiple communities, and you're teaching six indigenous languages every week on \$100,000.

It's an unrealistic expectation to put on anyone every week, but we don't mind doing it. That it is now in the third year of forcing this community to do that really makes you think about what it would really take. If we were going to treat indigenous languages the same and teach them in a similar manner that we would in an institution, what would that really look like?

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Would you have liked to have been named clearly in the bill? Don't the friendship centres have common ground across Canada?

Ms. Jocelyn Formsma: I think it's important that the urban piece is reflected in here. Even within the definition of "Indigenous organization", it's not clear whether you're talking about indigenous-owned and -operated organizations or indigenous representative organizations.

We're volunteer-run organizations. We are definitely indigenous, but to say that we represent a people and a group is a misnomer. It's the same with the media organizations, and maybe even organizations similar to Ms. Shmon's.

I think it's important to at least name the urban organizations. If you want to put our name in there, we would be more than happy for it. Knowing that we're a primary provider to the urban environment, I think that would be good.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

We are now going to Mr. Hogg for seven minutes.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Thank you very much.

Could you give me a bit of a breakdown with respect to the aboriginal friendship centres across Canada? What percentage of indigenous people do you believe live in urban areas, and how

would that break down for various provinces or regions across Canada?

Mr. Christopher Sheppard: It's on record from one of my previous presentations that the national number is 61.1%. We have an email from StatsCan to confirm that, and I think I provided it in one of my previous presentations.

I don't have a breakdown by province, unless Jocelyn is rocking that data somewhere. It's 61.1% of all indigenous people who live in urban communities.

Ms. Jocelyn Formsma: I don't know what the breakdown is percentage-wise, but I was just looking at some statistics that are available on the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network website, uakn.org.

In some areas—some of the bigger cities like Winnipeg, Edmonton—the percentages for indigenous peoples living in urban settings are anywhere from 8% to 12%, depending on which city you're looking at. With that website I just gave you and the research projects that were undertaken, there's a little snippet at the bottom that tells you the breakdown for each community that they had the research projects in.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Certainly, in British Columbia, we're told that within a two-kilometre radius of Main and Hastings in downtown Vancouver, there are more indigenous people living there than in the rest of the province.

Mr. Dan Vandal: That's true.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Dan tells me that's true, and he doesn't live in B.C.

Did you want to comment on that?

Ms. Karon Shmon: I would add that the Métis are under-enumerated. There's nothing from StatsCan that would accurately reflect the number of Métis people anywhere in Canada, including urban centres. Métis people have never found an advantage to identify who they are, so when there's a census, they don't necessarily say who they are.

This started back with our veterans when they enlisted and were asked their ethnicity. When they said "Métis", they were told there's no such thing. They looked at their surnames, and then depending on what it sounded like, they said they were a Scottish Canadian or a French Canadian. They just gave up.

It could also be viewed as a way to enable discrimination, so Métis people don't necessarily self-identify.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Where I was going with that—in finding out it's 61.1%—is that a lot of the indigenous people, particularly in downtown Vancouver, are street people. Many of them have a number of challenges.

We've heard consistently from the testimony in our hearings that indigenous language is an important part of culture, values, of being able to connect with others, to feel like you're a part of something.

Is there something that we could or should be doing that might do that, in terms of being able to look at the social value, social impact, being able to connect indigenous languages with the downtown areas, with the friendship centres?

At Main and Hastings in downtown Vancouver, we're establishing a large aboriginal centre. We have large components to it. Street people have been active in developing it. We took over the old City of Vancouver jail, so it's a really interesting place for them, going through the issues there and some of the rituals they have.

It seems to me, with 61%—and you tie that with the other testimony we've been hearing—that there may be some synergies there that could have a profound impact for some of those urban areas.

Could you comment on that, or help me with that?

• (1730)

Mr. Christopher Sheppard: I'll start by saying that Canada needs to start creating public policy based on facts. We have language legislation, and although 61.1% of indigenous people are urban, urban's not mentioned. Maybe we could start there. And it's not just there; it's across policy. It is a very challenging topic. Conversations need to be had in general, but I think when you start talking about the revitalization of languages and keeping the unique languages that exist only here, it's a reason to have those conversations.

I think making legislation and public policy decisions on data that we collect on every census, even when indigenous people always say that they're indigenous.... We don't even listen to the data that we have, and this has been the reality of friendship centres for the last 70 years.

I think the place to really start is to be honest with the legislation and the programs that Canada creates.

That's as honest as I can be.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: I know that Paul Lacerte has done a really wonderful job in developing the aboriginal friendship centres in British Columbia; he expanded them and they're all thriving. He's now off doing his Moose Hide Campaign and is removed from that for this period of time, but he was certainly active in looking at the value they could have.

If you were to place some statement into this legislation that's consistent with the value you've been reflecting, what would you put in, and where would it be? You've put that challenge out there in saying we need to do that. What facts should we use? What data should we use? What should we put in here, given that Bill C-91 is about indigenous languages, yet everyone's telling us there's that strong correlation with this....

Is it wrong to put it in here? Is it something that would be able to help in some meaningful way?

Ms. Jocelyn Formsma: We don't want to speak against the distinctions-based approach, but what ends up happening on the ground with the facts is that urban...ends up getting lost within those three streams. We're all of them, and we're none of them.

The Chair: You're out of time.

No, you don't get another one. I was just going to let her finish her answer.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: This is part of my previous one that I didn't quite—

The Chair: No, she was finishing an answer.

Ms. Jocelyn Formsma: Exactly.

I think we already made the comment that we would like to have urban...reflected specifically within the bill.

The Chair: I will point out that we have gone slightly over time. Ms. McLeod said she had a question of about two minutes. If it's okay with everyone to give those two minutes, I would invite her.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: It has been suggested that there be an annex that identifies the different languages, but I'm also hearing that this might be almost too restrictive and we're better off not to have it. It sounds as though there are a number of different.... You talked about Michif.

Is an annex important or not?

If the friendship centres have something they could send to the committee, if they have potential wording that they think would be helpful, if they have anything to say, I would welcome it. What we've heard is that the communities believe that they have ownership over the language. To follow up with Mr. Hogg, how does that intersect with the reality of 60% being off reserve? I think we have that challenge there, so I would welcome a written brief for that.

But in terms of an annex that identifies all languages, do you have a quick “yes” or “no”?

Ms. Karon Shmon: I would say no, because it could be hog-tying the legislation, and I think there are communities of Métis people within urban centres.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you.

• (1735)

The Chair: That brings today's meeting to an end.

Thank you to all of you, and thank you to the witnesses again. It's been very helpful.

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