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Chair

Ms. Julie Dabrusin

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

We now begin our 148th meeting of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. We are continuing our study of Bill C-91, an act respecting indigenous languages.

We have with us today Casey Henley and Francyne Joe from the Native Women's Association of Canada. We have with us by video conference Ms. Vivian Ayoungman, coordinator, research and program development, Siksika studies at Old Sun Community College. We have with us Ms. Margaret Peters, Mohawk language curriculum and resource developer.

I will begin with the person by video conference, just in case we run into any technical difficulties. We can begin with you, Ms. Ayoungman.

Ms. Vivian (Siipiisai'pia'ki) Ayoungman (Coordinator, Research and Program Development, Siksika Studies, Old Sun Community College, As an Individual):

[Witness spoke in Siksika as follows:]

Kitsiksimmattsimm'powa. Nisto annakok Sipisaipoyiyaakii.

[Siksika text translated as follows:]

I greet you all. I am Night Charging Woman.

[English]

Good afternoon. I bring you greetings from the Siksika Nation in southern Alberta. I'm very grateful to have this opportunity to add to this important discussion.

I have been in education for 50-plus years, since getting my undergraduate degree from the University of Calgary and then three graduate degrees. As I worked in education over these years, I have been involved in curriculum development. When I started teaching, I quickly realized that the curriculum wasn't getting to the hearts of our students. It wasn't reaching them, so I was always developing curricula voluntarily.

I've always tried to promote these initiatives. Over the years, I developed this passion because I knew we were robbed of our heritage. We were robbed of the right to be who we are, to learn our culture, to learn our language. I was separated from my large

extended family at the age of seven. I went to the boarding school and did not speak a word of English. I feel very cheated and very robbed, and so I have tried in earnest to contribute to the knowledge our people need.

In the 1980s, at Siksika we began efforts in earnest to revitalize the use of the Siksika language. We knew it was in decline. When we spoke to the local school principal, who was a nation member, he told us that in grades 1 to 9 he could count on one hand the number of speakers. That really shook us up. We didn't realize how bad it was, and that was in the 1980s.

It was a real challenge to conduct our work with very little funding, and at the time what was known as the secretary of state asked us how our language could be in jeopardy, since we came from one of the largest tribes in the country. We ended up having to justify why we needed funding. I as a volunteer, together with the team I was working with, did a major study on the status of the Siksika language. We did two studies, one in 1985 and a follow-up in 1991. We tested every child in our schools. We did a random selection of households and we interviewed elders. All of these groups corroborated and triangulated the evidence we were looking for.

We used a proficiency scale, "0" meaning no knowledge of the language, "1" meaning some understanding but not able to speak. Everyone under 21 years of age scored below 1. The majority were 0, with a few having some understanding. We had to do a lot of work, which at the time we considered critical work.

We went back, and because of our study we were able to access some funds from the Province of Alberta. With this little bit of funding that we got, we developed three comprehensive levels of teaching for the Siksika language. We developed comprehensive kits, but we always knew it was just the tip of the iceberg. We had so much work to do.

Then Heritage Canada came up with funding for indigenous languages, but at the time only the most endangered groups were funded at realistic levels. What did that mean for us? We were not on that list, and yet we knew we had critical work to do.

The study we did told us that in 30 years' time our speakers would be in their late 50s, which is the case right now, and that is exactly what's happening. Hardly anybody under 50 speaks the language.

I have developed, as I said, a curriculum over time, over these years, these decades, in my 50-some years as an educator.

I was semi-retired from my work with the First Nations Adult and Higher Education Consortium, and Old Sun Community College at Siksika recruited me to assist with their curriculum development. My doctorate degree is in curriculum development in instruction. As I was a fluent speaker, they thought I would be an asset to the team.

I told them I would do it on condition that I got to work with our ceremonial knowledge keepers. To make a long story short, I worked with this team, and was it ever an eye-opener. I used to say to people that I was a proud Siksika woman, but in working with these ceremonial knowledge keepers, I really saw just how much of my way of life I did not know about.

I'm a fluent speaker and I found that there was a whole vernacular that I could not understand very well. It was the whole language of ceremony, the essence of who we are as Siksika people. I thought if I as a fluent speaker do not speak that language and understand some of that terminology, we're in real hot water.

It was a really wonderful team to work with, because they really opened my eyes to the really critical work we had to do.

As a result of my work with our ceremonial knowledge keepers, we ended up developing 37 Siksika studies courses, which are all at the college level. Most of these are transferable to public institutions, such as St. Mary's University, Athabasca University.

In implementing these courses, the language is critical to teach the essence of what those topics are. I teach some of those topics, and I find myself saying a lot of the Siksika words that would describe exactly what it is we're talking about. Our young students really long to learn the language.

We have a lot of work to do. We're now looking at immersion programming at all levels. We want to develop immersion curriculum for the little guys, because we've talked to our other indigenous groups from other places and they say the place to start is with the very young ones. Teach them the language, and they'll grow up with it.

However, the reality is we might do that, but what will they go home to? They will go back to homes where they don't hear the language.

We're trying to do work on all fronts, including adult language immersion, so that they're actually learning as families. We're trying to go in that direction, but realistically, when we don't have funding, it's a very tough task, because we don't want to just have our speakers and our ceremonial knowledge keepers volunteer their time. It's really critical to recruit whoever we can, and time is of the essence to do this important work when our treasures are still here with us. Every month, some of our elders are gone, so while we still can, we want to work with them.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and other entities recommend teaching language culture, but a lot of those funds are being directed to public institutions. Can they realistically develop the important curriculum for us? At our college, we can provide the context. We are with our ceremonial knowledge keepers who speak the language, who live our way of life, and the work that we're developing is very rich, really rich. They cannot get that anywhere else.

•(1535)

The Chair: Ms. Ayoungman, I do have to warn you that you went slightly over time. Could you just wrap it up?

Ms. Vivian (Sipiisai'pia'ki) Ayoungman: Okay.

With that, I just want to say that it's really important, it's really critical that this funding go to the first nations groups, because that's the heart of where the language and culture are, and if it's not supported at that level.... I can say some four-letter words, but I don't want to.

The Chair: I appreciate that. I appreciate holding back on the four-letter words. Thank you very much, though.

On that colourful note, we will now go to Ms. Margaret Peters, please.

Ms. Margaret (Kaweienón:ni) Peters (Mohawk Language Curriculum and Resource Developer, Ahkwesáhsne Mohawk Board of Education, As an Individual):

[Witness spoke in Mohawk and provided the following text:]

Tekwanonhwerá:tons Sewakwé:kon

[Witness provided the following translation:]

I acknowledge everyone here.

[Witness spoke in Mohawk and provided the following text:]

Niá:wen tsi wahskwahón:kare ne aontakewenníneken'ne

[Witness provided the following translation:]

Thank you for inviting me to provide my voice.

[Witness spoke in Mohawk and provided the following text:]

Kaweienón:ni ne akhsenna'ón:we.

[Witness provided the following translation:]

My real name is Kaweienón:ni, which means "she makes the way".

[Witness spoke in Mohawk and provided the following text:]

Wake'nehsi:io tánon Onontá:keka niwakenhwentsiò:ten. Kanién'kéha akewenna'ón:we.

[Witness provided the following translation:]

I'm Onondaga Nation and I'm Snipe Clan, but I'm a fluent Mohawk speaker.

[English]

First and foremost, I am a mother and grandmother.

The retention, restoration, revitalization and reinforcement of the Mohawk language is both a personal and professional endeavour for me. I don't consider my work as a job, but rather as a responsibility to help and do everything in my power to provide opportunities for our community members to be able to learn Kanien'kéha, the Mohawk language. I could easily fulfill my obligation if you, as representatives of Canada, remain true to your word and fulfill your duties that you have laid out in the various sections of Bill C-91, which states that it is an act respecting indigenous languages.

Paragraph 5(b)(iv) states that one the purposes of the act is to:

support Indigenous language learning and cultural activities, including language nest and immersion programs

Within our community, we have been fortunate to have established two immersion schools. Akwesasne Freedom School, although independently run through grants, donations and fundraising efforts, has a tuition agreement with the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education. Even with all the hard work the parents do to fundraise, the dedicated language teachers receive a salary that is not even at par with the poverty level in Canada for a family of four. I read that in December of 2014 it was less than \$42,000 per year. This is a reality within many native communities, which struggle to maintain a sufficient level of education and struggle three times as much when it comes to the desire for language implementation.

The emphasis for language funding needs to be placed on immersion programming, as we all are well aware that the 40-minute core language classes do not produce fluent speakers. Am I right?

At present, I work for the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education as a *Kanien'kéha* Mohawk language curriculum and resource developer. Our struggle is that we don't have a lot of fluent speakers. We just can't find people who speak it to come to teach the language. I can't blame you who are present here today, because it wasn't your fault; you didn't want kids removed from their families and sent to residential schools. However, I can blame you if you don't take any action today and fulfill what you know is required for the people to restore their languages for the future, for the seventh generation.

In clause 9, under "Agreements or arrangements", it states that the purpose of the act takes into account "the unique circumstances and needs of Indigenous groups...in a manner consistent with the powers and jurisdictions of the provinces and of indigenous governing bodies and the rights of the Indigenous peoples recognized and affirmed by subsection 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982", which states that:

The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.

Any treaties and agreements were made with Canada, and the act need to be ratified and omit that the agreements or arrangements must take into account the needs of indigenous groups in a manner consistent with the jurisdiction of the provinces. The treaties were not made at the provincial level. They were made with Canada.

In clause 6, the bill states that:

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

I'm just reading some of the Canadian laws.

• (1540)

Ours were the original languages of "*Kana:ta*", the word that became "Canada", the name of the country. It seems only right to respect the original people of this land by reaffirming the recognition and endowing us with the same status that gave French and English equal status in the Government of Canada as official languages.

It has preferred status in law over all other languages because it is common knowledge that the Indian residential school system was a network of boarding schools for indigenous peoples and that the network was funded by the Canadian government's Department of Indian Affairs. The amount of funding that needs to be administered back into the reclamation of our languages should be equal to the funding that was put in to abolish our languages. I don't know the dollar amount, but I can estimate that it would be in the ballpark of billions of dollars. Excuse my estimation if I am wrong.

In clause 7, "long-term funding" needs to be changed to "ongoing funding". "Long-term funding" implies that the funding will be administered for a questionable length of time. This would not provide the said "adequate, sustainable and long-term funding for the reclamation, revitalization, maintenance and strengthening of Indigenous languages" into the next century.

As *Onkwehon:we*, the real and natural people of this part of the world, I would like to remind you, as representatives of *Kana:ta*, to go beyond the talk. Words are only words unless a conscious choice is made to act upon them. I'm standing in front of you all today and speaking on behalf of my grandchildren—Rarihwasésta, Tharahkwénhahs, Teiakotshatáténion, Raniehtanawénhtha, Roha'ti:io, Iakokari:io, Ieniehténhawe and Rarenneha:wi—so that they and their grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and the faces yet to come, have ample opportunities to continue learning their language.

[*Witness spoke in Mohawk and provided the following text:*]

Niawenhko:wa.

[*Witness provided the following translation:*]

Thank you for listening to me.

[*Witness spoke in Mohawk and provided the following text:*]

Eh kati' nikawénnake. Tane' tho.

[*Witness provided the following translation:*]

That is all the words. That is all.

[*English*]

Thank you.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we have Ms. Francyne Joe and Ms. Casey Hunley, from the Native Women's Association of Canada.

Ms. Francyne Joe (President, Native Women's Association of Canada): *Weyt-k, bonjour*, and good afternoon, Madam Chair.

I am Francyne Joe, president of the Native Women's Association of Canada.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are gathered on the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people's traditional and unceded territory.

Since 1974, the Native Women's Association has been the chosen national representative of grassroots indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people. We represent first nations on reserve, off reserve, whether status, non-status, or disenfranchised, and Métis and Inuit. We defend their rights and we advocate for those voices that are not heard.

Today I sit before the House of Commons to outline NWAC's significant concerns about Bill C-91, an act respecting indigenous languages.

The Minister of Heritage and Multiculturalism, Pablo Rodriguez, tabled Bill C-91 without meaningfully consulting NWAC. The co-development process excluded us.

NWAC supports the Government of Canada's efforts to preserve, promote and revitalize first nations, Métis and Inuit languages, and agrees that Bill C-91 is essential. However, NWAC cannot fully support it without major revisions to address these disparities.

First, Bill C-91 does not include a culturally relevant gender-based lens. Intersectional lenses are imperative to every government policy and legislative decision. It reveals the distinct and unique impacts that legislation will have on marginalized and vulnerable groups, especially indigenous women. This is essential to meeting their needs and implementing effective legislation.

Additionally, this must be led by indigenous women. We are the keepers of traditions, of cultures, of languages. We are the hearts of the communities, and we are the mothers teaching our children how to communicate. Indigenous women must be the foundations of all language revitalization efforts, with full inclusion.

NWAC strongly recommends that the government meaningfully consult with us to apply culturally relevant, gender-based analysis and hear the concerns and solutions that indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people have to contribute.

Second, Bill C-91 does not take a distinctions-based approach. You cannot treat the preservation of each language identically with a blanket approach, or it will fail. A distinctions-based approach considers how a specific policy, program, service, or piece of legislation will affect first nations, Métis and Inuit communities across Canada differently.

The act does not specify whether non-status indigenous women and their children have any language rights. It does not state how Métis people living all over Canada, not just in the west, will be represented and included. It does not take into consideration the needs and priorities of Inuit communities. While two-thirds of the Inuit population can speak Inuktitut, this number is steadily declining. NWAC recommends that before Bill C-91 can be passed, it must clearly outline how it will account for the distinct contexts, needs and priorities of first nations, Métis and Inuit communities with regard to language revitalization.

Third, the act must specify its legally binding commitment to provide adequate, sustainable and long-term funding for indigenous languages. Funding is one of the most substantial barriers to language revitalization.

On February 7, Mr. Virani stated, “over and over again in the consultations—that what we need is supports in terms of resources and what we need is stable, long-term, predictable funding.”

Outside of the preamble, the act does not specify that the government has legal obligations to create adequate, predictable, sustainable and long-term funding. This is not a question of determining a funding amount, but about distributing allocated funding enshrined in Bill C-91. NWAC recommends that before Bill C-91 is passed, it must clearly outline a legally binding commitment to provide adequate, sustainable and long-term funding.

Lastly, the act must specify its commitment to Jordan's principle.

Jordan's principle is a child-first principle aiming to ensure that first nations children have access to all essential public services, regardless of jurisdiction. Language education is an essential public service for all indigenous children.

Currently, every indigenous language in Canada faces potential extinction. We are in an urgent state for language education. There cannot be any delay in services due to payment disputes within or between the federal and provincial governments, because we know that language education is fundamental to identity, culture and the history of our nations. Language education is an essential service, yet indigenous languages are not treated as essential services. Would anyone deny language services for the cultural survival of French Canadians?

● (1550)

NWAC recommends that before being passed, Bill C-91 must clearly outline its commitment to Jordan's principle, as indigenous languages must be treated as an essential service.

Thank you, and *kukstemc*.

The Chair: Thank you to all of you.

We are now going to begin our question-and-answer period. Questioners will have seven minutes for questions and answers combined.

We will begin with Mr. Long, for seven minutes.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our presenters.

Good afternoon to my colleagues.

This, in my opinion, is landmark legislation. I'm a business guy. My background is business, and I'm always more about execution and implementation.

My concern is this, and I'm looking for your guidance, Ms. Ayoungman, Ms. Peters and Ms. Joe. With respect to the rollout of Bill C-91, knowing there are federal, provincial and municipal governments, as well as communities and villages and different ways, shapes and forms, Ms. Ayoungman, you said you wanted the money to flow directly to you and circumvent other layers, if you will. Ideally, how do you see this rolling out? How do you see the funding reaching the appropriate groups?

One of the concerns I have, if you're talking education, health care or what have you, is that there's a lot of infrastructure already there that can apply for money and disburse money and funding, etc. Can you give me your comments, Ms. Ayoungman, as to how you would see the funding rolling out to different groups across the country?

Ms. Vivian (Siipiisai'pia'ki) Ayoungman: The group I can speak for is the Siksika people. I am from the Siksika Nation. Internally, as a group, we meet about interagency work. We assist each other. That's how we would organize. We would try to see who would be in the best position to do whatever.

We already do that. We work closely with the Siksika Board of Education, because they are in need of developing resources. We at the college assist them. The social services department tries to assist their clients, and they work closely with us.

Where there is a gap is in how we fund the people with the knowledge—the ceremonial knowledge keepers, the elders and all of those people who have the knowledge to give. Yes, we can pool our resources, but usually those resources are already earmarked.

•(1555)

Mr. Wayne Long: Ms. Peters, would you comment?

Ms. Margaret (Kaweionón:ni) Peters: In our community, it's almost the same as she said.

When the funding comes through, it's not specifically designated for language. We have the Mohawk board of education, and it's the first time in history, really, that in the past decade or more we've had an immersion program. When the funding has gone out through the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education, we're overseeing the whole education system, but at this point we have kind of equal status with the English program. We've never had that kind of support before.

In our community we need to get language training for our people who want to learn the language, and we need teacher training for people who are fluent but need to learn how to teach the language.

That funding would be funnelled through there. As I said, we have a tuition agreement with the independent schools, so any language funding we get stays within the area of language revitalization.

Mr. Wayne Long: Okay.

Ms. Joe, I'm sorry you feel your organization wasn't consulted. I'm truly sorry about that.

Did you have no avenue to submit? Were you not consulted at all?

Ms. Francyne Joe: After the legislation was proposed, we received it. That was proposed on, I believe, a Monday. We received the legislation on Wednesday. Staff spent the next 24 hours analyzing the legislation and presented their analysis on Friday. That was the extent of our engagement with this legislation.

Mr. Wayne Long: To be clear, is it safe to say that you think Bill C-91 is a good start but needs amendments or t needs...? You suggested some amendments.

Ms. Francyne Joe: I did, yes.

Mr. Wayne Long: Is that where you would like to go with it?

Ms. Francyne Joe: Yes.

You were asking about the funding areas. I know our organization—and I'm sure it's the same for the other two ladies—has written many proposals. It's kind of time-consuming to have to write these proposals every year when we know what the community needs. The community knows what it needs. I think we need to have funding that's flexible and fluid, and programs that are codeveloped with community members.

You're right, you know, that there's a lot of overlap. In my own territory I have about five languages. I have Ntlaka'pamux, Stl'atl'imx, Okanagan, Tsilhqot'in and Secwepemc. That's within an hour's drive of Merritt, B.C.

Mr. Wayne Long: Is it safe to say there are 90 indigenous languages in Canada?

Ms. Francyne Joe: And then you have the dialects on the side.

Mr. Wayne Long: Then there are the dialects. Okay.

A previous presenter—I believe it was Jennifer Wickham—talked about three phases of language development, if you will. The first phase she had was revitalization. Then she went to stabilization and then extension.

This would be for you, Ms. Joe, if you don't mind. How long do you think it will take? Again, I'm proud of this bill. I think it's a great start. It's not perfect, but it's something that I think we can build on. How long will it take to see indigenous languages go from revitalization to stabilization to extension? Do you see this unfolding over 10 years? Is it going to take a lot longer than that?

The Chair: I'd love to hear the answer to your question, but you are already right at your time.

I would like to give Ms. Joe the time to quickly respond to that, if she can give a short answer. I know it's not a short question.

•(1600)

Ms. Francyne Joe: Right.

In a nutshell, I think it really depends upon the communities. Some of our communities are already working on the revitalization. It also depends on our fluent speakers. My uncle Jimmy Toodlican just passed away last fall. He was one of probably two dozen fluent speakers of Ntlaka'pamux. If we don't do this soon, we're going to be penalizing our children.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you.

The Chair: We will know go to Mr. Shields, please, for seven minutes.

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

I appreciate all of our witnesses here today. I appreciate the information that they're bringing to us.

I would like to start with Siipiisai'pia'ki, Ms. Vivian Ayoungman.

I've been in the Old Sun College. They are doing some very, very interesting things, but you're right about the people who have the knowledge and how even though you are a very large band, with significant resources, getting them to the right place is critical. I think you have identified...

My colleague was mentioning funding in the sense that we've had organizations here, national organizations, that have said, "Give the funding to us, and we'll figure out what to do with it." I don't think that's what you would suggest. Am I right?

Ms. Vivian (Siipiisai'pia'ki) Ayoungman: You are correct.

When it happened the last time—well, I don't want to go back, but one of the realities was that there was the aboriginal languages initiative, and I think unnecessary red tape was created. In our experience here in Alberta, there was funding, but it was channelled through organizations and it took forever for it to get from one entity to the provincial entity and for the crumbs to finally get to the communities. As far as I'm concerned, there's a lot of waste along the way. We critically need the funding at the local level, because as I've said, we know what it is that we need.

We need to work with our ceremonial knowledge keepers and our seniors who are speakers of the language. There are two distinct groups, if you understand where I'm coming from.

Mr. Martin Shields: Yes.

Ms. Vivian (Siipiisai'pia'ki) Ayoungman: These ceremonial knowledge keepers have critical knowledge that provides the context. The others who are seniors have life experiences, most of them boarding school-related types of experiences.

At our local level is where we need to decide where we can get the greatest mileage. Internally we can organize and say you do the research; you do the interviews; you do the apps; you do the teacher training; you do the implementation. We need to approach it on all fronts, but within our first nation is where we need to determine how we'll approach it.

Mr. Martin Shields: I think, as you're expressing, one size doesn't fit all.

Ms. Vivian (Siipiisai'pia'ki) Ayoungman: That's it, yes.

Mr. Martin Shields: I mean, you have an excellent council that has to work with a large number of things in your community, but at

least the decision would be made within your community. If the money comes to that council directly, rather than through other layers, it gives you the opportunity to work with that funding at that level of decision-making.

Ms. Vivian (Siipiisai'pia'ki) Ayoungman: Exactly. To us, it's really important, because within our nation, we are unique. We have a unique history. We are all at different places in terms of where we are with our culture. Some people may overlook all of the ceremonial and historical stuff. At our nation, it's critical. Nobody else can ever tell us how to be Siksika and how to go about doing that.

Mr. Martin Shields: Right.

Ms. Vivian (Siipiisai'pia'ki) Ayoungman: We have to do it internally, and we have been doing it very successfully at Old Sun College by creating 37 courses. To implement those 37 courses, we need to keep researching them. A lot of it, with local knowledge... There are still people who have the oral stories.

We're not interested in listening to somebody else's oral stories; it's our local stories that we need to gather. It's our apps that we need to develop. We developed a language app. It's a very important tool, but it's very costly to do apps.

Mr. Martin Shields: I really appreciate that.

I think that with regard to the bill, Ms. Joe, you're explaining that in the consultation on the specifics, as we have heard from others, you feel very left out of this process. You're not the only one we've heard from who was very concerned at the lack of consultation.

Once again, I'll give you a few seconds to explain how critical that was do. We've heard what you had to do, but how left out did you feel when you received this thing and realized who else had already known about it?

● (1605)

Ms. Francyne Joe: For us, of course—I think for any indigenous woman—languages are so important, because we pass them on to our children. We sing the songs and tell the stories in our language. That's the first....

The song transcends so much. Even though my auntie had Down syndrome, she knew the songs and she could sing me the songs. Unfortunately, when I went into elementary school, I lost that. I started not speaking my own language, and then I moved away and didn't have the support. Now I can't teach my own children the language. My mother can't either, because she was in residential school, and my grandmother is gone.

We need to have these resources archived and made into apps—

Mr. Martin Shields: You didn't get a chance to be consulted on that.

Ms. Francyne Joe: No, we can't share that. I think we have a lot. A lot of women have a lot to share about what we want to see with this act, because it's going to affect our generations, our children.

Mr. Martin Shields: You've said some very specific things about the legislation. Do you believe you can fix it with those amendments?

Ms. Francyne Joe: As was stated, I appreciate the time here to bring the concerns we have. I'm concerned about what's going to happen after this legislation is passed. I want to ensure that the funding gets to the communities, and that it's the knowledge keepers, the fluent speakers....

Sometimes our own local schools can help provide the support system to get the languages out there in our territory. In Merritt, B. C., we have Nicola Valley Institute of Technology.

Mr. Martin Shields: Following up on Mr. Long, I think that's what he was asking. How do you see that getting to you? Where does it get to you? Does it get out through other organizations? Does it get out of the provincial...? How do you think it should get to you?

Ms. Francyne Joe: It depends from community to community. Some communities have their education systems set up. Some have their own community-led initiatives in place. I'm sure the Inuit and the Métis have their own systems in place. I know that for my own territory, we would probably be going through our bands and our local community college. We would need to make sure the elders are being treated fairly.

Mr. Martin Shields: It would be designated to your band specifically.

Ms. Francyne Joe: It's definitely up to the community, but it definitely needs to go to the distinct groups that need this funding.

Mr. Martin Shields: Right.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Saganash is with us today.

Mr. Saganash, you have the floor for seven minutes, and I believe you would like to share your time with Ms. Jolibois.

[English]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Thanks, Madam Chair. I was going to mention that I was going to share my time with my colleague, but since you did....

First of all, thanks to all of the presenters. The things you have said to this committee today have been things I have been saying over the years. I'm honoured to be sitting with my colleague today; we're two of the indigenous MPs in the House of Commons who are fluent speakers..

I think you all spoke about the urgency of the matter with respect to indigenous languages in this country. I'm saddened to see that the purposes of this bill, under item 5(b)(i), suggest that we need to assess the status of indigenous languages in this country when we all know that there is urgency in the matter.

I'll be sharing my time with my colleague, but I want to ask you first, Francyne, and this is going to be my only question. The government and other leaders in the country have bragged that this legislation has been "codeveloped". When I attended the technical briefing right after the bill was introduced in the House of Commons,

one of the questions I asked—and the parliamentary secretary who's in front of me right now can attest to this—was when the Government of Canada stopped considering the Native Women's Association of Canada as a national organization.

Women are the language keepers. We all know that. In every indigenous culture and tradition, they're the language keepers. I learned my language from my mom and my grandma. I asked that question. There was no answer to that question. When did that stop? How come you weren't involved in this so-called codevelopment of this legislation?

This is pretty different, in my view—and I said that in my speech when the bill was introduced—from co-drafting. I don't think the AFN held the pen in drafting this legislation. When did that stop? I'd like to get that clear first.

• (1610)

Ms. Francyne Joe: I have to say, having been president since the fall of 2016, that NWAC has unfortunately been overlooked quite often. We have been told by government organizations, government departments, that the woman's voice is already represented by the other three national indigenous organizations. However, the reason we have this missing and murdered indigenous women's inquiry is that the Native Women's Association had the Sisters in Spirit program that demonstrated there were over 500 missing and murdered indigenous women in Canada.

There are definitely gaps happening, and when you have an organization of indigenous women already here in Ottawa and in every province and in two of the territories who want to work with this government because it will improve the communities, it saddens me to see that we're being ignored sometimes.

The Chair: Ms. Jolibois is next.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Thank you for making that comment. I appreciate that comment, because as an indigenous-speaking person and woman here, I go through it on a daily basis, and so thank you for validating that.

We have heard from ITK, AFN and the Métis National Council. The organizations AFN and MNC are very supportive of this legislation, with very small limitations attached to it too. ITK, on the other hand, is not. Then I hear "codeveloped". For convenience's sake, the government often says, "we have codeveloped", and then they list five organizations. That includes your organization and that includes even the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples. That's for their convenience's sake. I have heard that. For this purpose, ITK is asking for official indigenous language status across Canada, and yesterday's witnesses spoke to that. How do you guys feel about that?

Can we start with you over there in Alberta?

Ms. Vivian (Siipiisai'pia'ki) Ayoungman: Are you talking to me?

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Ayoungman.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Yes, to you. You're the only one over there.

Ms. Vivian (Siipiisai'pia'ki) Ayoungman: I've worked with the indigenous colleges, and that has always been one of our arguments. We've always said that perhaps what we need to do is to gain official status and get the amount of money we really need to do this important work, because all of our first nations colleges are doing critical work. They're doing the research, the development, the implementation of courses, or many times would like to, as there are a lot of initiatives on back burners because they do not have the funding.

Indian Affairs, in their wisdom, or lack thereof, in the last few years used to have monies that went off the top of first nations dollars in education that went to post-secondary. Off of the post-secondary dollars, they took a little bit to give to our first nations colleges, but as I said, in their lack of wisdom, those monies became proposal-driven, and it was devastating to our first nations colleges. What happened? In B.C. none of the indigenous institutions got any money. In Alberta, the first one to be hit was Red Crow Community College, from the largest tribe in Canada. The next year we got hit.

Now, over the last two or three years, we have not received any federal funding. It's all going to public institutions that will teach us who we are, teach us our language. We've talked to them, and they don't have the programs we do. Our students come to us and say, "I never got this at that public institution. I'm so glad I'm coming here, because I'm getting it." What we have been saying over the years is, wouldn't it be wonderful if our languages were recognized as official languages, and then the dollars would be pumped into them?

I want to thank the other ladies for talking about funding stability, long-term funding, because those have always been issues for our first nations colleges. We operate on year-to-year grants, on shoestring budgets, never quite knowing what is going to be funded. It would be so nice to know once and for all what we're going to be able to do in the years to come, but we never get that opportunity.

•(1615)

The Chair: Thank you. That brings you to the end of your seven minutes.

We will now go to Mr. Miller for seven minutes.

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Lib.):

[*Member spoke in Mohawk as follows:*]

Wa'tkwanonhwerá:ton í:se néne kèn:'en sewatia'tarò:ron. Kwe kaweienón:ni.

[*Mohawk text translated as follows:*]

I thank you all who are gathered here. Hello Kaweienón:ni.

Ms. Margaret (Kaweienón:ni) Peters:

[*Witness spoke in Mohawk as follows:*]

Kwe.

[*Mohawk text translated as follows:*]

Hello.

Mr. Marc Miller:

[*Member spoke in Mohawk as follows:*]

oh niohtonhátie?

[*Mohawk text translated as follows:*]

How is it going along?

Ms. Margaret (Kaweienón:ni) Peters:

[*Witness spoke in Mohawk as follows:*]

Ioianerákie.

[*Mohawk text translated as follows:*]

It is going along well.

Mr. Marc Miller:

[*Member spoke in Mohawk as follows:*]

Skennen'kó:wa ken? Hen ioiánere.

[*Mohawk text translated as follows:*]

Is everything good? Yes that is good.

Ms. Margaret (Kaweienón:ni) Peters:

[*Witness spoke in Mohawk as follows:*]

Ioianere.

[*Mohawk text translated as follows:*]

That is good.

Mr. Marc Miller:

[*Member spoke in Mohawk as follows:*]

Wenhniseri:io wáhi!

[*Mohawk text translated as follows:*]

It is a nice day isn't it!

Ms. Margaret (Kaweienón:ni) Peters:

[*Witness spoke in Mohawk as follows:*]

Nahò:ten?

[*Mohawk text translated as follows:*]

What?

Mr. Marc Miller:

[*Member spoke in Mohawk as follows:*]

Wenhniseri:io.

[*Mohawk text translated as follows:*]

It is a nice day.

Ms. Margaret (Kaweienón:ni) Peters:

[*Witness spoke in Mohawk as follows:*]

Kwah í:ken tsi wenhniseri:io ne átste. Ostón:ha iowísto.

[Mohawk text translated as follows:]

It is really a nice day. It is a bit cold.

[English]

Mr. Marc Miller: I first off want to acknowledge the two fluent language speakers here who are members of Parliament, members of the NDP who have spent a good part of their lives in the struggle to preserve indigenous languages. I'm just a learner. I do want to underscore that.

Kaweienón:ni, could you speak briefly? I'm going to give my colleague Kent Hehr my last couple of minutes, but I want you to speak to your struggle in your community to preserve the language.

I visited Akwesasne Freedom School. It's a school that is built out of armed struggle over treaty rights, and out of that came a school that was able to preserve and underscore language, culture, tradition. What is your experience in ensuring that people actually become speakers?

Ms. Margaret (Kaweienón:ni) Peters: In 1980, when the Freedom School began, it was more like we had a community political uprising. The school began around 1980. People didn't want to send their kids to the board-run schools, the federally-run schools. The people at that time decided they wanted to take education into their own hands, and I like what she said about the ceremonial part, because that's what the Freedom School was pretty much based on. There's no separation of language and culture.

The Freedom School, when it began, didn't have much money. It was just people who wanted their kids to learn the language. The parents hadn't learned the language, but they wanted a place that could provide their kids with the opportunity to learn it.

The Freedom School became an immersion program in 1985, and I became a teacher in 1986. I think we were making about \$200 Canadian a week. We were there for years. Some teachers before me were volunteering their time. They got food baskets. These are the kinds of struggles we have with our language situation.

We have a population of 15,000 people, and we're lucky if we have 700 speakers. It sounds like a lot compared to other native communities, because so many have lost so many speakers.

Our language is at a critical state. I don't know if anyone here is bilingual, if you speak French and English. What if all of a sudden there were no French speakers left? You can't find teachers to teach French in the schools and you can't find interpreters. Well, that's the situation we're in today.

At the Freedom School, people said we didn't have real teachers because they didn't go to school to learn about.... The school, since its operation, has actually produced a lot of fluent speakers, and some have become teachers in the school.

The heart and the desire and the commitment to the language is in our community, but we are always struggling with going ahead.

It's sad to say. It's always that we lack the funding to hire teachers or....

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you. I appreciate that.

I believe we were sharing time with Mr. Anandasangaree, so I am now going to Mr. Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you all for being here.

Ms. Joe, I really do want to thank you for the work of NWAC. I know our government values the work you do and I think we've worked together on many different initiatives.

With respect to languages, I was rather perplexed, so I had to get some clarity from the department.

My understanding is that you're right about the codevelopment: We had three national indigenous organizations that were part of the codevelopment process, and NWAC was not one of them. I believe we had 1,200 engagements with individuals and organizations with respect to the consultation, and I am advised that NWAC participated in five of those engagement sessions. Of 20 engagement sessions, I think you were part of about five. I'm also advised that NWAC received \$166,000 in funding to undertake consultation and that a written submission was received from NWAC.

My sense is that while in your opinion, it may not be adequate—and I respect that if you feel that way—we want to put on the record that we definitely value what you're doing, and that your perspective is essential to the work we've done. Bill C-91 in part reflects many of the things recommended by you and your organization. I want to acknowledge this and to thank you for raising your concerns. Certainly, we will continue to engage on this as we go forward on the funding, and on other aspects, and in the future we will definitely work more collaboratively with NWAC and your team.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'll give you a few minutes if you want to comment—no, I'm sorry. It's not a few minutes, actually, but a few seconds that I can give you if you wanted to add to that. Then we'll be closing this panel.

Ms. Vivian (Siipiisai'pia'ki) Ayoungman: I'd like to comment about the work we do at my level. When I started doing the curriculum work at our college, I followed protocol and worked with our ceremonial people first. I had a feast, I met with them and I told them about the work we were going to do, and they said, "We fully support your work." I went to recruit them to work with our college.

They said that what they wanted to help me do was to open that darn closet. They said that their way of life, their language and everything had been locked away for far too long. They said that it was about time that we opened that closet. They said that it brought them back to residential schools. When they first got there, all of their personal items—their clothing, their language and their culture—were put in a little sack that was thrown in a closet, and the door was locked. "It's about time we opened that door," they said. "We'll work with you."

I started working with them. In ceremony, a lot of the people that conduct the ceremonies are men, but throughout this they said, "Talk to our Siksika women for the women's teachings." I work with a core group of Siksika women at our level, at our community level, and that's where we're getting the input from the women—the stories, the lullabies, the child-rearing and the women's roles. That's where all of that is coming from, and it's very much Siksika culture-based.

•(1635)

This is a really historic time, then, for this committee to be discussing such an important bill. At this time of the year, there are many reasons of importance. At the launch of the International Year of Indigenous Languages, I also referenced another part of my life, which was as a commissioner for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. For six and a half years, as I'm sure you all know, we went across the country, listening to former students. Survivors of residential schools shared their stories with us. Sometimes I would ask them, "What does reconciliation mean to you?" I remember one old man said, "Reconciliation, to me, means you give me my language back." He paused, and then he said, "No. No. Reconciliation, for me, means give me half of my language back and I'll be very, very happy."

I also want to share with you an opportunity I had on another occasion. I know that some of you have heard me say this before, but I ask each of you this question: Have you ever heard a language die? Have you ever heard a language die? One time, at a meeting at the United Nations, where we always offer an invocation and a prayer to begin our meetings, we asked an old man if he would be willing to say a prayer for us. He said, "I want you to listen very carefully. Listen to the sound of my voice. Listen to the words I'm going to use, because I am the last living person who speaks our language." He went on to pray. About a month later, I got a phone call from a man who said, "Willie, the old man died." I said, "What old man?" He said, "Do you remember the man who prayed for us at the UN? He died."

I would not wish that experience on anyone. It was almost like somebody hit me right in the gut. I didn't know the man, but I heard his language, and I heard it die. That's how important this work is for me. It's because of the situation of our languages across the country. I heard survivors say, many times in anger and many times in tears, that they wished they could speak their language, but they couldn't; it was beaten out of them, they said, at residential school.

With that background, I look at Bill C-91 through the lens of a treaty. I have some comments I want to make in that regard.

•(1640)

The Chair: If I may, I must inform you that you've already gone a couple of minutes over, so try to get them out quickly. I want to make sure we can hear from everyone on the panel.

Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild: Okay.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: I was going to let you get your comments in right now, if you wanted....

Okay. Then I will go to Chief Gerald Antoine of the Liidlii Kue, please.

Chief Gerald Antoine (Liidlii Kue First Nation, As an Individual):

[*Witness spoke in Dene Zhati as follows:*]

ʔeh heŋ mashi...mashi neredɬ du kadu dzɬ na ka k'anɬ shɬ nezu tets'iridi nɪde mashi neredɬ nethɛŋ

[*Dene Zhati text translated as follows:*]

I am happy to be here today to speak with you and hope that we can understand each other.

[*English*]

I would like to thank the people here for giving me this time to share with you some of the things you're deliberating on with regard to Bill C-91. I come from a community called Liidlii Kue.

Margo passed out the medallion. I'd like you to look at that, because it's something that will tell you about our existence and about a relationship that we have. First, I'm a Dene person. "Dene" is a four-letter word. Earlier on, one of the committees wanted to use a four-letter word. I'm going to use a four-letter word, but not a swear word.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Chief Gerald Antoine: Two sounds come from the word Dene. "De" makes reference to the river and "ne" makes reference to the land. You are of the land and of the water: That's what a Dene person is.

Another thing is that our land is really big. Liidlii Kue is a functional area. It's a place name for the confluence of Dehcho and Nachahdeh, which newcomers call the Mackenzie and Liard rivers. This is a place Pope John Paul visited in 1987. I was the chief at the time. Today I'm also the chief, but it doesn't mean I was chief all the time.

I went on a walkabout to just across there, to the Canadian Museum of Civilization, where I was an intern. I had a chance to visit some of our belongings and some of our relatives there.

It's a special gathering place. You'll notice that the spirit of our language, the Dene language and other indigenous languages whose voices have been shared here, illustrates who we are and the relationship we have with all living things in our home territory. We have lived through our functions and our responsibilities with the land since time immemorial, and we will continue to live this way of life. As we move forward, we will also continue to look for meaningful ways, as we have, of putting food on the table.

We are part of a large linguistic family that spans from Alaska and the Northwest Territories through southern Alberta to the northern territories of Mexico. I'm here to speak with you from my position as chief regarding this process and to express three points of consideration. These are specific to jurisdiction, capacity and process. I will conclude by offering the committee some solutions to the problems that will be identified in this presentation.

As you'll notice from the medallion, two years from now we'll be commemorating 100 years of a relationship. This relationship is an international relationship. This is Treaty No. 11. My great-grandfathers, Ehtilo and Nakehgon, were two of the leaders who engaged the representatives of the Crown in right of Great Britain. This agreement was inherited by Canada. By entering into this international arrangement, the Dene and the Crown recognized one another as nations and agreed to coexist in peace and friendship.

At the time, in preparation for this relationship, Dene Zhati, or the Dene language, was used to communicate with the Crown, making it a medium for our treaty relationship and a treaty right. The Dene language is the basis for understanding the spirit and the intent of this relationship of coexistence. This was recognized by the Canadian courts in the Paulette case—and within the international community to this day.

• (1645)

Dene Zhati expresses who we are and is our spiritual database. It is a cornerstone of our nationhood, transferred to us by our ancestors through countless generations of experiences and observations of the land and all living things. Today I think people refer to this as “traditional knowledge”. However, from my context, it's a lot more than that.

Who we are is expressed through our language. This is the reason we did not cede anything when the Crown entered into a treaty with us. We insisted that your people would peacefully coexist with us. We did not give up any of our inherent rights or title. We retained our jurisdiction over ourselves and our inherent right to self-determination in all matters. It is from this foundation that I speak to you today.

My second point is in regard to the context of Bill C-91 and the lack of an assurance that capacity will be made available for the revitalization and sustainability of Dene. This has occurred once before, when the Government of the Northwest Territories enacted its Official Languages Act in 1984, recognizing the indigenous languages in our territory. This included Dene Zhati.

Although this act has been in place for 35 years, there are problems. The reason that the Dene originally supported the act is that we thought it would help revitalize and protect our languages. There was help mandated by the Dene to ensure this legislation would work, but since then, capacity has been removed from the existing legislation.

How much time do I have left?

• (1650)

The Chair: You have a minute, but I gave everybody else extra, so you can have two minutes.

Chief Gerald Antoine: Okay. I just wanted to skip that part because I made my point.

This is really significant, and I point out here that one only needs to examine the Northwest Territories Official Languages Act in comparison to Bill C-91 to see striking similarities. This is alarming to me. Bill C-91 presents an updated version of the NWT Official Languages Act, with some language around reconciliation and indigenous rights sprinkled over it, but the actual clauses do not provide any guarantees of capacity funding.

If you look at the treaty relationship, there were specific understandings and guarantees, and that has not been fulfilled. In all the different things that have been going on with any legislation, that's what's been happening. Yesterday, you heard things about corruption. You could look at this in that context too, because there's something not right.

My sister earlier on talked about crumbs. The other thing is that we're on the side. There are some things going on. When you're travelling around together, there are people in front of you who see everything and this is where you are. We're in the back, and you're yelling at us, saying, “What do you want? What can you see?”

We can't see anything. We don't know what we want because we're not there. We need to be there. The treaty relationship says that it's going to be coexistent, so we need to be there. We need to look at how we need to do that.

That's a point that I wanted to make, because the process—this is the point I'm making—is the process. Yes, we need capacity. The other thing is that there is a jurisdiction. There's the Crown's jurisdiction and there's Dene jurisdiction. It's coexistent. We need to work together. That's how we need to move forward.

That's how I feel, and that's how we need to move forward.

[*Witness spoke in Dene Zhati as follows:*]

heheḅ mahsı ja ga, sé nezu ga ga tı dá, sé nezu gogi k'odé ʔetedıth'é, teghalak'odá hahógha, kuđı t'a ʔası nezu kođı kehé kođı huđá ts'adé huđı nezu ha. Mahsı

[*Dene Zhati text translated as follows:*]

Yes, I am thankful for being here today, it is good to be together and seek things out as a collective. I see that as the best way for all of us. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to the Cree Nation Government, please.

Grand Chief Abel Bosum (Grand Chief, Cree Nation Government): Good afternoon, Madam Chair, and honourable committee members.

[*Witness spoke in Cree as follows:*]

σά'đłē <σ'ḅ ḅḅσḅ, ḅ ḅ σ'Δ<ḅḅḅ ḅ ḅ Δ'ḅḅ ḅḅ, ḅ ḅ <ḅḅḅḅḅ ḅḅḅ σ'ḅḅ σ'ḅḅḅḅḅ ḅḅḅ

[*Cree text translated as follows:*]

Today I thank God that he has made it possible for me to speak to you and also from our people.

[*English*]

I just wanted to give thanks to our creator for the gift of our language in Cree, and the ability to speak it. My name is Grand Chief Abel Bosum, and on behalf of the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee, I am pleased to appear before you today. I am accompanied by Dr. Sarah Pashagumskum, chairperson of the Cree School Board and CEO of Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute; Dorothy Stewart, Cree language coordinator, social and cultural department; Tina Petawabano, responsible for indigenous relations with the Cree Nation Government; and Paul Joffe, legal counsel.

The Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee includes more than 18,000 Eeyou Istchee, or Cree, occupying our traditional territory of Eeyou Istchee. This territory covers around 400,000 square kilometres and is located mainly to the east and south of James Bay and Hudson Bay, with additional territories in Ontario.

The social and cultural department is responsible for the Cree nation's language program and policy. Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute is a museum, archive, library and research and education centre. The Cree School Board, over the past decades, has played a large role in Cree language research and program development as a primary instrument for Cree language maintenance in our territory.

From the outset, we wish to acknowledge the potentially far-reaching significance of Bill C-91, an act respecting indigenous languages. At the same time, we fully recognize the important challenges associated with reclamation, revitalization, maintenance and strengthening of indigenous languages. Clearly, there must be adequate space and flexibility to accommodate the perspectives and priorities of each indigenous people or nation.

It is important to note that according to the General Assembly of the UN, sustainable development includes language and cultural development. Also, there is a consensus that no one must be left behind. This explicitly includes indigenous peoples.

In our experience, implementation and enforcement of legislation are always a challenge. In particular, adequate resources are urgently required to carry out the programs and other initiatives for language development and preservation at all stages. At this crucial point, we need more clarity in regard to the specific global amounts that the federal government is setting aside for at least the next five years. This will help our ongoing planning and other activities under Bill C-91.

Fluency in languages is recognized globally as the most important standard. We are pleased that Bill C-91 consistently refers to fluency as a key standard and objective. In addition, we wish to underline the critical importance of the bill in linking indigenous peoples' languages to the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

At the same time, it's important to underline here that as indigenous people with the right of self-determination, we view our rights in a holistic manner. All of our inherent and pre-existing rights are interrelated, and interdependent. Our rights to language and culture cannot be separated from other inherent rights, especially our rights to lands, territories and resources. With respect to Cree language and culture, the words we speak derive from our

relationship with the land. The words, thoughts and world views that we pass on to our children are connected to the land.

These essential interrelationships are explicitly affirmed in the UN Declaration, in its seventh preambular paragraph:

Recognizing the urgent need to respect and promote the inherent rights of indigenous peoples which derive from their political, economic and social structures and from their cultures, spiritual traditions, histories and philosophies, especially their rights to their lands, territories and resources.

● (1655)

Therefore, it's important to highlight the pressing need for umbrella legislation under the UN declaration. Such legislation, namely Bill C-262, has already been passed by the House of Commons and is currently at second reading in the Senate. We are proud that Romeo Saganash, a member of our Cree nation, sponsored Bill C-262, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples act. This bill will advance the human rights of indigenous people in Canada. It will also set an important precedent for indigenous peoples in other countries worldwide.

As underlined in call to action number 43, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls on the federal government and all levels of government to implement the UN declaration as a framework for reconciliation. Therefore, implementation of the declaration is inseparable from the TRC call to action. Any member of Parliament who fails to support the UN declaration is also undermining Canada's national reconciliation initiative.

As highlighted in the preamble of Bill C-91:

...2019 has been proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations as the International Year of Indigenous Languages to, among other things, draw attention to the critical loss of Indigenous languages and the urgent need to maintain, revitalize and promote Indigenous languages;

Such loss or severe impairment of indigenous languages—whether through residential schools; dispossession of lands, territories and resources; forced assimilations; destruction of culture; or other acts of colonization—must be redressed in authentic ways. Such ways must respect our ability to determine ourselves how we will maintain our languages and the vehicles that we will utilize to do so.

We look forward to working harmoniously with the federal government and others to achieve the critical objectives of Bill C-91.

[*Witness spoke in Cree as follows:*]

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[*Cree text translated as follows:*]

Thank you, I thank you all.

[*English*]

● (1700)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will have a bit of a faster round of five minutes, beginning with Mr. Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: This is the last panel for the study in this committee. We have gathered a very esteemed panel of experts and people with lived experience. I want to thank you all for being here.

Grand Chief Littlechild, may I ask you to offer your thoughts? I know you were trying to finish off. I'm wondering if you can give us your suggestions on changes. We had an earlier conversation, and it's very important we have it on the record.

Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild: Yes. Thank you very much. I'll be very brief.

There is mention of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, but I think there are two other pieces of legislation that we should look at to guide our discussion or further drafting of Bill C-91.

The first one is the declaration by the Organization of American States, OAS, on the rights of indigenous peoples. In that declaration there are two very specific articles that really speak to the bill.

The second instrument I would refer to is the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, comment number 11 talks about indigenous children and their rights to language.

Those two international references should be considered as well as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The second point I was going to make was to propose another "whereas" clause, or indeed an operative article. Let me read it very quickly: "Whereas treaty stories, songs, ceremonies, traditions and beliefs are carried in indigenous languages, indigenous history, oral testimony and language must take paramountcy in interpretation of rights and responsibilities, according to the original spirit and intent and as understood by indigenous peoples."

Lastly, I would say it's important to.... I'll give you a list. There are about nine specific places where I believe you could insert "treaty" to strengthen Bill C-91, from our perspective. Right now treaties are only very minimally mentioned in two places.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, Grand Chief.

For the record, Mr. Clerk, could the suggestion the grand chief gave us be recorded? I think it would be important to have it recorded.

This is to Chief Antoine. I'm going to try to come to the Cree Nation Government as well.

I have a very specific question relating to official languages. In NWT, I understand there are 11 official languages. What is the status of all those languages with respect to access to service? Are you able to obtain services in Dene, for example, from the provincial government, or are there challenges to implementing the multilingual nature of the NWT?

Chief Gerald Antoine: What we're challenged with there—and this is just my experience—is that it has gone in-house. There is no real relationship with it, from our perspective. There was an idea

there again, and they thought that it would work. Canada had understood that they were going to make separate legislation, and when they were talking about it, for all the aboriginal languages in Canada at that time, in 1984, the budget for all the languages in Canada was \$250,000. They were asked if they wanted to take that money. They said no, that it had to be separate. When they did separate legislation or a separate process, then they were given some money for implementation. I think it was \$18 million in a span of three years.

However, it's a machinery that did all these processes, and here we are again at the porch, so to speak, and we're not involved with the capacity or the processes. That's where it stands. Right now, it's very minimal.

• (1705)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, Chief.

The Chair: That's all your time.

Mr. Yurdiga, you have five minutes.

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to thank everyone for coming today.

Over this process, I've learned a lot. I do have family who are first nations and everything else, but you really grasp how serious this is when you go from coast to coast to coast. We see young people moving to the cities, becoming more urban. They're losing the connection to their home community. Their language and the culture are slowly slipping away. I don't know what can be done to solve that, but I guess this is a great first step.

One thing that I've been told numerous times is we want a grassroots approach to this issue. We want individual communities to be able to have the flexibility to do what they need to do in a community. Not every community is the same.

My first question will go to Grand Chief Littlechild.

Do you believe it's important that there be grassroots established, so that we're not going to have some kind of a new bureaucracy handing out money with strings attached to it? Do you think it should be grassroots, with the ability to do what needs to be done to ensure that the next generation has the tools they need to bring back their culture and language?

Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild: Yes. The foundation of it has to be the family. I'll give you three examples of what my community has done in an effort to revitalize our language in connection with young people, for example.

We have a Cree app for children. We also have a Cree dictionary, and we also now have a declaration that Cree leaders have made that in our territory, Cree is the official language. It's forcing us and causing us to use our language more, because it's the official language for our territory. It's not to deny the other two official languages, but for our territory, our chiefs and leaders have said Cree is the official language.

Those are three small steps, but what's happening is it's filtering down to the children's level, and that's where I think the foundation has to come from.

I would also support the point that Grand Chief Littlechild made about the treaties.

In our case, we signed a treaty back in 1975. In the first 20 years, we had problems implementing it, because we were expecting Canada to implement it, and it didn't happen. It led to about 30 court cases. It wasn't done until after we renewed that agreement.

Since then, we've taken over. We've assumed the responsibility of implementing our treaty, and I think this is something we would look

forward to if this bill gets passed and resources are made available to do it.

The Chair: That's the end of your time period as well.

This has been our final panel on Bill C-91. I want to thank all of you for your contributions. Today we've had a lot of really helpful testimony as we wrap up our study of the bill.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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