



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 016

Friday, June 12, 2020

Chair: Mr. Bob Bratina



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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 16 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. I would like to start by acknowledging that I am joining you today from the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinabe and Chonononton nations.

Pursuant to the order of reference of April 20, 2020, the committee is meeting for the purpose of receiving evidence concerning matters related to the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Today's meeting is taking place by video conference, and the proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. During this meeting, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entire committee.

In order to facilitate the work of our interpreters and ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

Interpretation in this video conference will work very much like at a regular committee meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of either floor, English or French. In order to resolve the sound issues raised in recent virtual committee meetings and to ensure clear audio transmission, we ask those who wish to speak during the meeting to set your interpretation language as follows: If speaking in English, please ensure you are on the English channel; if speaking in French, please ensure you are on the French channel. As you are speaking, if you plan to alternate from one language to the other, you will need to switch the interpretation channel so it aligns with the language you are speaking. You may want to allow for a short pause when switching languages.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can either click on the microphone icon to activate your mike or you can hold down the space bar while you are speaking. When you release the bar, your mike will mute itself, just like a walkie-talkie.

As a reminder, all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair.

Should members need to request the floor outside of their designated time for questions, they should activate their mike and state that they have a point of order. If a member wishes to intervene on a point of order that has been raised by another member, they should use the "Raise Hand" function. This will signal to the chair your interest to speak. In order to do so, you should click on "Par-

ticipants" at the bottom of the screen. When the list pops up, you will see next to your name that you can click "raise hand".

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

The use of headsets is strongly encouraged. If you have earbuds with a microphone, please hold the microphone near your mouth when you are speaking to boost the sound quality for our interpreters.

Should any technical challenges arise, for example in relation to interpretation or if you are accidentally disconnected, please advise the chair or clerk immediately, and the technical team will work to resolve them. Please note that we may need to suspend during these times as we need to ensure that all members are able to participate fully.

Before we get started, can everyone click on their screen in the top right-hand corner to ensure they are on "Gallery View"? With this view, you should be able to see all the participants in a grid. This will ensure that all video participants can see one another.

During this meeting, we will follow the same rules that usually apply to opening statements and rounds for questioning of witnesses during our regular meetings. Each witness will have up to five minutes for an opening statement, followed by the usual rounds of questions from members.

I will just advise everyone with regard to our opening statements by our witnesses and our rounds of questions that I'll be fairly tough on the timing. We really hate to interrupt thoughts as they come forward, but we also have to be aware of keeping the meeting orderly so that everyone gets an opportunity to ask their questions with the full amount of time. We hate to run out of time at the end of the meeting. That's why I may give you a one-minute warning or ask you to wrap up a point.

Welcome to our witnesses. From the Assembly of First Nations Alberta Association, we have Regional Chief Marlene Poitras. From the Creative Industries Coalition, we have performer Tom Jackson. From the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, we have Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, and from the Long Point First Nation we have Chief Steeve Mathias.

Regional Chief Poitras, you have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Regional Chief Marlene Poitras (Regional Chief, Alberta Association, Assembly of First Nations): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning.

[Witness spoke in Cree as follows:]

ᑭᑕᑎᑖᑎᑖ ᑕᑖᑖ ᑕᑖᑖᑖᑖ

[Cree text translated as follows:]

I thank you all.

[English]

I thank you for the opportunity to address you from the heart of Treaty 6 territory. I represent a region fully encompassed by treaty numbers 6, 7 and 8.

These treaties are more than just agreements between our nations to share the land and live in peaceful co-existence. They are living, breathing relationships that form the basis of your Constitution to this day.

I raise this because many nations are the beneficiaries of the clauses in their treaties, including for the provision of medicine and assistance in times of pestilence. While financial aid and resources have moved quickly to first nations and the collaboration and communication of our regional office have been commendable, Canada continues to fail to meet its commitments and obligations to our treaty relationship, even during a specific circumstance when the Crown promised to support us in a way that we needed.

First nations are being recognized for how they have addressed this crisis. By setting up borders, curfews and other security measures, first nations have fared better statistically speaking than Canadians, but, as one of my colleagues recently said at a meeting, this is not only because of an overabundance of caution, but in fact that the response that so many have celebrated was also born out of necessity.

Our leaders put those extraordinary measures in place because we still have homes that house upwards of 15 people. We have elders who could perish from this disease, and there is never enough time to transmit the knowledge they carry. We have a disproportionate number of people who suffer from chronic illnesses, and we have communities where people can't even properly wash their hands. The list goes on and on.

If it's not a clear sign that systemic racism is alive and well in Canada, I don't know what else this country needs to hear to finally take action on the gross inequality that exists between Canada and first nations.

The fact is that when the indigenous community support fund was rolled out, Canada used a funding formula that only accounted for first nations on-reserve members when it very well has the ability to account for all first nations members both on and off reserve. This is proof that Canada is only willing to recognize our nationhood within the confines of a reserve. How can a government purport to support nation rebuilding when it intentionally finds ways to limit our authority and jurisdiction to borders it determines?

To make matters worse, our leaders scrambled to pass public health orders and laws to safeguard communities from this virus. Some of them in Alberta had to expend exorbitant amounts of own-source revenue to hire security teams to protect their communities. When law enforcement agencies were called to support these public

health measures, some refused and said our laws weren't enforceable or, worse, were unconstitutional.

How can we ever be true nation-to-nation partners if Canada is unwilling to accept our laws as equal to its own? This country already recognizes two legal systems, civil and common. It is not unreasonable to expect the same for ours. Let me remind you that if Canada didn't recognize our treaties, you wouldn't have a Constitution.

As we begin the phased reopening of our societies and start working toward economic recovery, we recommend that there be increased availability of testing for first nations people; that first nations-specific assessment guidelines for testing, contact tracing, treatment and vaccinations be designed with first nations technicians, leaders and knowledge keepers; that first nations be able to determine their data needs and that those be responded to appropriately for planning subsequent health crises.

This latter point is critical to self-determination because first nations have not been the first to find out when a confirmed case is in their community. The province continues to hold that information, which then goes to Canada, and finally to the first nation.

Moreover, tracking of cases by Alberta Health reflects first nations on and off reserve, yet the source of information is outdated and is still based on the old Alberta health care data arrangement. Similarly, census data from 2016 is still used as the base number of our populations. Those numbers aren't accurate because many first nations don't actively participate in the census.

• (1110)

Last, distinct funding must be provided to support first nations businesses with the recovery, and we must be active participants in the rebuilding of our economies. I say this because I keep hearing that people can't wait until things get back to normal, but there's a part of me that says normal didn't do us justice. Normal meant injustices for our people; it meant underinvestment in our communities; it meant the exploitation of our lands without our consent.

We now have an opportunity to work together to make things better: to develop our solutions, to develop our laws and to develop whatever it is we need to ensure our people can benefit and thrive. The only way that is going to happen is if our treaty partners come to the table and we work together effectively and efficiently in true partnership.

Thank you. *Ay Hiy. Nanaskomin.*

The Chair: Thanks, Chief Poitras.

Mr. Jackson, 40 years ago I was a young DJ and I was entertaining some young people from the Northwest Territories. I was playing some pop music of the day and I asked these young kids who the big pop star was where they came from, and they said, “Tom Jackson”. That was 40 years ago. It's a delight to have you here in person to speak from the Creative Industries Coalition.

Sir, you have five minutes. Please go ahead.

• (1115)

Mr. Tom Jackson (Performer, Creative Industries Coalition): I want to thank you for your acknowledgement of *North of 60*. It was a great and wonderful time for me.

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to speak with the indigenous and northern affairs committee of the House of Commons. I'm proud to be here and I'm honoured to be speaking at this historic time in Canada.

I would like to acknowledge that I am on the Blackfoot territory of Treaty 7.

My name is Tom Jackson, as you know, and I'm here to speak with you on behalf of the Creative Industries Coalition, a group of unions and guilds representing artists and technicians working in live performance.

With COVID, entertainment was the first to go and it will be the last to return, particularly the live-performance sector. About 50,000 Canadians are out of work. There is virtually 100% unemployment in our industry, and our members are experiencing wage losses of about \$130 million per month. Due to the freelance or gig nature of our work, fewer than 2% of our members are receiving support from the Canada emergency wage subsidy. Many contract workers are not eligible for employment insurance. We need an extension of the CERB. Although the program runs until October 3, the maximum eligibility period is 16 weeks. Most entertainment industry workers applied immediately. Their benefits will run out in July.

We need an extension of the maximum eligibility period, to beyond 16 weeks, and of the end date of the program. Until it is safe for us to return to work, we need this financial support.

Now, if you don't mind, I need to tell you a bit of my story.

I'm just an old six-foot-five Indian guy with a braid. I have a treaty number. I was born in the back of a horse-drawn buckboard between One Arrow First Nation and Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, on October 27, 1947. That tells you two things: one, I have been around for a long time and, two, I'm a pretty lucky guy. You know what makes me lucky? I became an entertainer. I discovered radio. I discovered radio doesn't have a colour, so I was lucky.

I have more than one number. I have five union numbers. I'm a member of ACTRA, SAG, CFM, Equity and the Writers Guild of Canada. You're probably thinking to yourself, “Wow, that guy must be making a lot of money.” Nope. As a matter of fact, a lot of my fellow artists, people in the entertainment industry, are just like me. Lots of numbers but no money. They are brothers and sisters of mine who bring you happiness, joy and health every time you turn on your screen or your music. Entertainment is the most powerful

instrument of change in human history, but right now its players are invisible. They're just numbers.

Let me ask you a question. Would you like to see a better Canada? If you'd like to see a better Canada, say “I”.

Some hon. members: I.

Mr. Tom Jackson: Okay, some of you would. If you'd like to see a better Canada, say “I”.

Some hon. members: I.

Mr. Tom Jackson: If you'd like to see a better Canada, say “love”.

Some hon. members: Love.

Mr. Tom Jackson: Now not only is Canada better, but you just made the world a better place. Do you see how entertainment can change the world? This is not new, but it's magic.

Do you remember Live Aid or know Farm Aid? Do you know a little project called The Huron Carole? The Huron Carole alone has raised \$230 million in cash and in-kind services for Canadian food banks, disaster relief and social services in crisis. Even today, with the help of musicians who wish to participate, there is also a project called Almighty Voices, which provides entertainment, creates health and raises money for the Unison Benevolent Fund. When you need us, we're there for you. You have the want; we have the will.

Now we need your help. We need you to do your magic. We need your political will. We need you to make the invisible visible.

• (1120)

One thing I would see as a godsend is an extension of the CERB.

In my tradition, you may know this, but some of you may not, but it's important for you, so pay attention. You have to know that I love you. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jackson.

Our next speaker is from the Nishnawbe Aski Nation. Welcome, Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler.

You have five minutes. Please go ahead.

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler (Nishnawbe Aski Nation): I'm very honoured to appear with Mr. Jackson. *Meegwetch*, “Peter”, for your work over the years.

Also, Regional Chief Poitras, *meegwetch* again for your leadership during these difficult and uncertain times.

Meegwetch to the committee for inviting me and allowing me to say a few words.

I want to start by saying that Nishnawbe Aski Nation represents 49 first nation communities, 43 from Treaty 9 and six from Treaty 5. We have a vast territory in the northwest and northeast part of the province of Ontario.

I was asked today to talk about the federal government's response to date to this pandemic. On March 11 when the World Health Organization made the declaration that COVID-19 was a worldwide pandemic, the first thing we found out was that the federal government did not have a plan, so we had to scramble. As a first nations community, we were already behind the eight ball in terms of the level of health care and the living conditions in our communities with the housing and the lack of proper infrastructure. Right now in the NAN territory we have 18 boil water advisories, nine long term, nine short term, including the Neskantaga First Nation, which has been on that list going on 26 to 27 years.

When we found ourselves in this situation in March, we knew we had to act very quickly. One of the first things we did was to put together our own team, or what we called the NAN COVID-19 task team, comprising public health experts, doctors and knowledge keepers. We had our own people on that team, and they've proven to be a very valuable resource to our communities over these last three months.

Then we had to do a lot of work to keep our communities safe, and we have over these last three months. There's only been one positive case so far in the NAN territory, which was in Eabametoong in early April, and it's since been resolved.

We are grateful for the protection from our Creator. Everything we do is based on the fact that even though we may think we have our own strength and our own knowledge, it's the Creator who in the end looks after all of us. I really believe that, and every chance I get to talk to our leadership, I talk about how important that is, and that we need to keep working together as a nation. We've been reaching out with Treaty 9 in our case. We also have a treaty partner with the Province of Ontario, and we've reached out to both Ontario and Canada to work with us and join us in this effort to keep our communities healthy and safe during these dangerous times.

One of the things we also found out right away is that the things we're trying to address weren't new. These are long-standing issues, and the regional chiefs from Alberta have had some of these issues.

• (1125)

In addition to dealing with a public health disaster like a pandemic, we're also saddled with all the historic wrongs and the inequities in every field, whether it's education, health, infrastructure. Then you throw a pandemic in the mix. That's a recipe for a public health disaster.

We created that trilateral table where we have been working very effectively with both levels of government over these last few months. I would ask that some of these things that we put together... They need to be carried forward past the pandemic. I think we've been able to prove to both Ontario and Canada that, if we work together, we can do a lot of things. We can really speed up on some of the things that we've been trying to address for many years, and we want to see the tools and the process that we've developed carried forward post-pandemic.

The Chair: Chief, I'll have to ask you to leave it right there, and we'll pick up more of your comments later on.

Right now, it's time for Chief Steeve Mathias.

Chief, you have five minutes. Please go ahead.

Chief Steeve Mathias (Long Point First Nation): Hello.

First, I would like to acknowledge the speakers before me: the regional chief from Alberta, Chief Poitras; Mr. Tom Jackson; and Chief Fiddler. I want to acknowledge them, and I really share their intervention. I will give you a little bit more of a scope from a community perspective. I will also take this opportunity to acknowledge the MP from our riding, Sébastien Lemire.

Mr. Chair, I would like to extend my gratitude to you for this prestigious invitation to address the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

I hear a lot of noise in the background that's really distracting me.

The Chair: Can I ask everyone to make sure that their mikes are off?

Go ahead, Mr. Mathias. There's not something rubbing on a cord in your office is there?

Chief Steeve Mathias: No.

The Chair: Okay.

Carry on.

Chief Steeve Mathias: Are you going to allow me another 30 seconds for that, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: Absolutely.

Chief Steeve Mathias: Before answering the question on the effects of the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic on my community in particular, I find it important to provide you with a brief history and the issues behind the land status of my community of Winneway. It would serve to enlighten the standing committee on the difficulties that we face and manage.

My own community of Winneway is considered by most departments and governments as a semi-isolated community. It is geographically located in the Témiscamingue region in the northwestern part of the province of Quebec. Our population includes approximately 500 people living in the community and another 400 members who live outside the community due to a housing shortage. At first glance, it is what can be considered a typical aboriginal community, with a young population and challenges around housing, community infrastructure and economic development opportunities, given its location. I always say that you don't pass by Winneway; you go to Winneway, considering it is the last little town within the local eastern sector of the MRC.

Over and above the physical location, what's more surprising to many is that Winneway is not considered a reserve under the Indian Act. Some sections of Winneway are considered a settlement, and others have a federal title, so what comes along with this type of recognition is the jurisdictional dispute and disclaimer by both levels of government.

There is also the historical presence of the Missionary Oblates that dates back to 1951 through a lease between the Oblates and the provincial government of Quebec. Therefore, the land that we occupy is, in the majority, located within the boundaries of the Oblates' lease. The administrative agreement that binds ISC and the Oblates has long since expired, in that the Oblates want to transfer the land back to the province, stating that their mission to the Indians is now terminated.

All the while, the Anishinabe people of Long Point have never ceded any parcel of their traditional territory. Land was taken through a process of dispossession. Although this historical truth of unceded territory is not unique in the province of Quebec, the situation of the sectional and divided parcel of land of the present-day Winneway is unique. What comes with it are unique situations and challenges on both the federal and provincial levels.

When the state of emergency was declared in mid-March, my council and I rapidly put in place a local pandemic committee, and we've been working seven days a week to prevent the spread of this deadly virus among the people and the community. We have put every ounce of our energy into developing measures, educating, creating awareness and setting up temporary community infrastructure because of our semi-isolated location. Many pieces of the giant puzzle were laid out on our table, despite not having our own public security to enforce our rules, regulations and the council resolution. The one important element that remains is the confirmation from the Province of Quebec for a public health decree. It is Long Point's last resort in reinforcing our health guidelines and safety measures with the support and co-operation of the Quebec provincial police.

In conclusion, our people have faced many epidemics before when, historically, there were some were intentional biowarfare attempts meant to eradicate our people. COVID-19 and the federal government's financial aid were seen as a shift in the way past governments have behaved toward us, although there were still some paternalistic administrative constraints that were imposed in this, over and above the lives and safety of our people.

Kitci meegwetch.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Just before we move to questions, Mr. Jackson had submitted a remarkable video that we had hoped to enter into testimony today. It's not quite compliant yet with the translation requirements of our committees, so we're working on that. When that is achieved, I think I have general agreement from the committee that we would like to play it, but we just can't do it at this moment because of compliance issues with regard to translation.

That said, we have a six-minute round of questioning now. Our questioners the first time around will be Mr. Zimmer, Mr. van Koverden, Mr. Lemire and Ms. Qaqqaq.

Bob Zimmer, please go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses, especially Mr. Jackson and Chiefs Mathias, Fiddler and Poitras for being with us this morning.

My first question is for Mr. Jackson.

My file is northern economic development, so part of my hope for the future is to see our economy functioning again. I've heard that the loss to the film industry is profound, including the impact on the people working in that industry.

How do we get back to that normal where we were before when Canada's film industry was doing so well? How do we get back there amidst this COVID cloud that still hangs over Canada?

• (1135)

Mr. Tom Jackson: I think we have to be very diligent and committed to finding ways to collaborate in a fashion where we aren't trying to spend our energy and time negotiating, but that, in fact, we spend our time and energy collaborating and deciding, based not on "you think I know", but on you having to tell me what you're assuming so that I can tell you what is not right. I'll tell you what I assume about you, and you can tell me, "Well, that's not true", so we can come together to have a better understanding of what our issues are.

I am, for sure, not one of those people who is an expert who can pull fairy dust out of the air and give you a magic answer as to how we get back to the place we were before, but I know that if we are to succeed in re-establishing ourselves as an industry, we have to concentrate on two things. One, we have to concentrate on making sure that the people who drive this industry are fairly compensated, just as human beings, for having been there when you needed us. Second, understand that the people we are representing are all workers in the industry, not just actors and clowns like me. There are people who get their fingernails dirty every day, but right now they can't do that.

Until we find a way they can do that, we have to make sure they are taken care of, because if there is no leadership and there is nothing to eat, there is no pack, and there is no leader. We can't do it without your help.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thank you, Mr. Jackson.

If there is anything you'd like to submit to the committee afterwards, too, because what we're looking for is anything that would help in any way, whether it's access to PPE or whatever that looks like, to get our economies functioning wherever they are.

My next questions are for the chiefs.

Chiefs Mathias, Fiddler and Poitras, again, thank you for joining us today.

Again, my file is economic development. I've seen the lack of access to PPE and I've definitely read your stories online about that lack of access during the crisis. I know we have bands up in my neck of the woods in northern B.C. where access to PPE was a big problem to emergency plans and those sorts of things. It was a big challenge; they were left scrambling. I was buying bleach for them from Walmart so they could go out to deal with some of these situations.

That was then. Certainly things aren't great right now, but there's more of a hopeful place to go in our minds right now, and in our mind's eye is how we can get to that hopeful place in the future where our economies are functioning, not just the way they were before, but even better. What can we do? With COVID as the topic today, how do we get to that place?

We'll just start off with Chief Poitras and go to Chief Fiddler and then to Chief Mathias for just a few comments there.

How do we get our economies functioning again and even better?

Regional Chief Marlene Poitras: First nations have always participated in the economy. As a matter of fact, I believe we have over 40,000 businesses across Canada. In moving forward, we should be involved because we have a lot to contribute to society. The business leaders we have are fairly astute and can provide some good direction on moving forward in the economy.

The government also needs to be cognizant that their businesses have had a huge losses during the COVID shutdown. Somehow these businesses have to be compensated for that, but they have to be at the table to provide that guidance and direction.

• (1140)

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Great.

Chief Fiddler.

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: *Meegwetch* for the question. I think it's an important one as we ponder what that recovery will look like. I would say that in NAN territory we've developed frameworks on the reopening of NAN, what that could look like, but also we're in the process now of developing a framework on recovery. I agree with the points that Chief Poitras has raised.

Some of the MPs who are on this committee have probably heard about the resource development that's happening in NAN territory with the Ring of Fire, a potentially big project. I would remind all of us here who are on this meeting today that a framework has already been provided for all governments in terms of how they should engage with the indigenous community, and that is UN-DRIP, on the rights of indigenous peoples. That spells everything out in terms of engagement, consultation and accommodation to make sure that all parties benefit.

The Chair: I'll have to interrupt there. We're well over, and I want to make sure everyone gets an opportunity to ask their questions as well as get the answers, of course.

Next up is Mr. van Koeverden for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's nice to see everybody, and thank you very much for the incredible interventions today. I think I speak for all of us when I say thank you for joining us. This is a really impressive panel.

I'd like to start by acknowledging that I am joining you today from the sacred territory of the Wendat, the Haudenosaunee and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

Chief Mathias, when I did a little bit of research on your community, I saw that your emblem is a canoe, so I also want to acknowledge that I made a name for myself here and abroad with an Inuit invention, the kayak. I like to acknowledge that it's a great boat and a great vehicle, so thank you for that contribution.

My questions today will focus on youth and on how sports and arts dovetail with mental health supports in your various communities. I'd love to hear from everybody, so I'd ask you, if you could, to keep your interventions brief. Then we can hear from everybody.

I think I'd start with Chief Poitras, if I could, to more thoroughly understand how the supports with respect to mental health can be better and more culturally relevant and can create better outcomes for youth with respect to arts and sports specifically.

Thanks, Chief.

Regional Chief Marlene Poitras: The youth are very important to our society because they're going to be our next leaders. It's really important that we put measures in place that support them in sports, arts or whichever area they want to go into, even if it's leadership.

I believe that the voices of youth are really strong. They're very astute. If you look at the statistics in terms of suicides that have occurred during the pandemic, they say to me that there's a definite need for more funding, resources and supports for our youth going forward.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thanks, Chief Poitras.

Chief Mathias.

Chief Steeve Mathias: The population of our youth is very significant. Just in my community, those under the age of 25 represent 65% of the population. There's not very much opportunity, even in terms of sports. We don't have an arena. We're pretty far from that. We are very lacking in community infrastructure. Investments in that need to be made in our community.

We have to reach out to those kids, to those youths, because information is power. We have to be able to communicate with them. They all go on Facebook today and all of that, so they're there and they really have high hopes to see things happen in our community.

When we're completely dependent on government programs and services, that's what makes it even more challenging for us because the government can announce all kinds of monies, but reaching out and getting those monies is a bigger challenge. Often we don't meet their criteria or we don't even fall under the guidelines, especially for a small community like mine, which is kind of semi-isolated, so we have difficulty accessing funding.

• (1145)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thanks, Chief.

Mr. Jackson, my dad and I watched a lot of *North of 60* when I was growing up but we also watched a lot of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and when you appeared on that show, it very cool to see a Canadian and an indigenous person represented in space.

Could you talk about your relationship with kids? I know you've also been an athlete, but could you elaborate a little on mental health and youth?

Mr. Tom Jackson: Thank you very much for bringing up the subject.

There are a couple of points that I'll make quickly. One of them is creating health versus managing disease. Right now, we live at a very important crossroads in our time where we can spend all our time managing disease or we can spend some time creating health.

Our youth are inherently very good with their hands. When I went through school, I wasn't the smartest cat in the world. I dropped out of school, but the reason I dropped out was that they took a basketball out of my hand.

I can tell you this: If you put a guitar, a paintbrush or a needle that makes beadwork in a student's hand, if you give them the things they're good at, they're going to stay in school. If you only challenge them to be academically smart and together and to do what the rest of the world is doing, you might lose them and you don't have to.

Help them be what they want to be, too. Take their voices and listen to them and allow them to create health for themselves. Allow them to smile and be happy. That makes a big difference. As leaders, we have to help, to try to provide the access to the asset.

The Chair: That brings us right to the time.

Mr. Fiddler, the technician is trying to get in touch with you with regard to how your microphone is selected, so check your phone. The icon for the microphone is on the bottom left. There's an arrow and when you press the arrow it shows different microphones to be selected. IT thinks you might not be on the same microphone as you're using.

I'll let you deal with that as we move on to our next questioner. Just check your phone as well, because IT might be trying to connect you.

[Translation]

Mr. Lemire, you may go ahead. You have six minutes.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): *Meegwetch*, Mr. Chair.

Kuei, members of the committee.

I want to say what a privilege it is to be here today. I'm especially excited to have the opportunity to speak with Chief Steeve Mathias. This will be one of the finest discussions I've taken part in since becoming a member of Parliament. I should say that my father would be particularly proud to see us conversing formally in a parliamentary committee. I'm quite moved to be here, so I'd like to thank my fellow member Sylvie Bérubé for giving me this chance.

You'll notice that, behind me, is a painting by one of your famous artists, Frank Polson. It's with me just about every time I have a meeting online. I like having it close by not just for its artistic beauty, but also for its symbolic importance. It exemplifies the riding of Abitibi—Témiscamingue, which has a strong and vital indigenous presence.

Mr. Mathias, your role and leadership were fundamental in keeping your fellow constituents and community members safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first time we spoke, it had to do with bringing home members of the community who were travelling, some of whom had health issues.

I want to mention how warmly you welcomed them. Once the arrangements had been made and they were able to return home, you made sure they had a safe place to stay while in quarantine. They were well looked after. The food was already there. That just goes to show the compassionate spirit that guides you when members of your community are involved. You also showed leadership to keep the virus from spreading like a powder trail, as you put it. You acted boldly in closing off your community, because you feared the virus would spread quickly among members of the community given the housing conditions.

At that point, what did you ask the federal government for?

• (1150)

Chief Steeve Mathias: Thank you for your question, Mr. Lemire.

We asked the federal government to help us set up infrastructure.

We went into lockdown and we closed off access to the community—there's only one road into Winneway. We told people that they couldn't leave the community except for medical reasons. They couldn't leave to get groceries; everything had to be done within the community. We asked the federal government for funding so we could buy groceries for the entire community, and luckily, the answer was yes.

Next, we began planning how to manage the response. We set up a committee to pass emergency measures and notify the community. I take part in a radio show almost every night of the week to make sure people know about the steps we are taking.

Obviously, it wasn't easy since people weren't used to being confined to the community. Normally, they make use of all the land. The lockdown was definitely a challenge.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: That's to your credit, Mr. Mathias.

As we know, historically, your community has had to move a number of times against its will, especially to accommodate hydro-electric projects. Your community still does not have reserve status. It's actually considered an Indian settlement, so the authority to make decisions autonomously remains at issue.

What are you asking for in that regard? If you had full jurisdiction to manage a situation like the COVID-19 response, how would that help you, as chief of the community?

Chief Steeve Mathias: Clearly, it's like trying to govern and manage the community and land with one hand tied behind your back.

We don't have legal status, but we aren't very open to being considered a reserve under the Indian Act. We'd prefer having status similar to that granted to the Kanasatake Mohawk community, for which the House of Commons passed special legislation. That's the type of status we'd like to have to better manage and govern the community. It would also give us the ability to pass our own regulations.

Right now, we don't have our own police force. The Sûreté du Québec serves the community, but it doesn't follow the band council's resolutions and regulations, except by court order or public health decree.

• (1155)

[English]

The Chair: I'll have to interrupt there. We're past time.

Thank you, Mr. Lemire and Mr. Mathias.

Now we have Ms. Qaqqaq, for six minutes. Please go ahead.

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq (Nunavut, NDP): *Matna.* Thank you, Chair.

I'll give a shout-out, as always, to the IT team and the interpreters for putting up with us, basically, and I thank all the witnesses for sharing their experiences and such valuable knowledge.

My first question is for all three chiefs. I am going to ask that you each try to stick to about a minute for your answer, just because of my time limit.

Can you talk about how your experience working with the federal government to support communities during COVID-19 has been? We've heard a lot of frustrations about resources that weren't needed being delivered and timely COVID data not being shared. Could you talk about your own experience?

I'd like to start with Chief Fiddler, then go to Chief Mathias and then Chief Poitras.

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: Working with the federal government is a bit of a hit-and-miss. That's why we've tried to streamline the communications process and the decision-making processes in partnership with Ontario, so that we can move as quickly as we can on many of the issues we're struggling with. It is becoming an effective tool for all of us. That's why I think we want to tell both Ontario and Canada that we need to maintain these processes in place post-pandemic.

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq: Thank you.

Perhaps we can have Chief Mathias next, please.

Chief Steeve Mathias: We had a rather rough start with the federal government, and that was mainly at the bureaucracy level. What was so frustrating for us was that we felt it was pretty much a delaying tactic.

All we were asking for was to have portable trailers come into the community so that, in the event of a spread of the virus in the community, we could immediately isolate our people, because of the overcrowding situation we have in our community, the lack of housing and the high number of chronic illnesses we have like diabetes and so on.

We had to go public. We had to start putting out press releases to pressure the government to meet the requests and demands we were making. Only there and then were we able to get quick answers. Minister Miller had to intervene on one or two occasions, but things went fairly well afterwards.

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq: Thank you for sharing.

Regional Chief Marlene Poitras: Thank you.

Personally, in my relationship with the government, they've been very responsive. I've had direct contact with Minister Miller and Minister Blair.

I guess the biggest issue is the lack of involvement of first nations at the table when resources were being doled out across the country. There were always questions about how they came to those numbers. For example, \$135 million was recently announced for businesses. How did governments come to that number without our involvement?

• (1200)

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq: Thank you all for sharing.

Ms. Poitras, along with my party, I want to make sure the government follows through on its commitment to fully adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Can you talk about the importance of making sure those fundamental rights may have changed the delivery of COVID resources and what impact it could play in our framework for post-COVID recovery?

Regional Chief Marlene Poitras: The national chief has been really pushing for UNDRIP to be legislated, and I believe that was a commitment from Minister Lametti in our recent conversation with him.

Of course, UNDRIP supports first nations. It has the free, prior and informed consent. It's a great document to enable us to move forward collectively and to live in peaceful coexistence, as stated in the treaty. We have those documents that support first nations. I think if they were implemented—if the political will is there—we could move forward together in a good way in addressing the many issues we have in this country.

The Chair: That brings us right to time.

Thanks, Ms. Qaqqaq. That was well done.

Mr. Viersen, Mr. Battiste, Mr. Vidal and Mr. Powlowski are our next round of questioners, for five minutes.

Mr. Viersen, please go ahead.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Ms. Poitras, you talked a little about own-source revenue and how many of the bands in northern Alberta are having to use that to fund the COVID response. Could you talk about what this own-source revenue is, where it comes from and how bands use that typically?

Regional Chief Marlene Poitras: Certainly.

Own-source revenues are derived from the businesses that are owned by the nations or by individuals. In Alberta, we have five casinos that are first nations owned and they've generated a lot of revenue from that, so they were able to fund some of the deficits in the COVID response. We also have some first nations that have oil and gas revenues. There are all types of ways that first nations have generated those funds. Of course, having to use those funds is depleting those resources as well.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: It's interesting. Casinos were probably all shut down during COVID, so that revenue doesn't continue, and the oil patch is hard hit as well, which would also hit your own-source revenue. I just want to get that on the record.

Mr. Fiddler, in northern Alberta, most of the communities put up barricades to all the roads entering their communities. They basically had a checkstop at every entrance, and that seemed to have worked. We've had a couple of tragic cases in northern Alberta, but for the most part, the indigenous communities have fared reasonably well due to those blockades or checkstops working. Is that a similar experience in your neck of the woods?

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: Yes. It has been extraordinary to witness the efforts that our leadership and our citizens have made over these last three months to keep themselves safe, including putting up checkpoints or barricades. In our territory, we have 35 remote communities. I think we have 20 that are road accessible, so they've put in these barricades or checkpoints to limit traffic in and out, and it has been very effective.

One of the presenters talked about the issues around enforcement. That's something we are working on right now, knowing that today the province is moving into phase two of reopening the economy. We need to give assurance to our leadership and our commu-

nities that they have every right to maintain those measures after today and that they will be respected.

• (1205)

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Yes. I heard that all my friends in Ontario are excited about getting haircuts.

Around the blockades or the checkpoints, essentially, there was some frustration in northern Alberta just around the consistency of enforcement at those checkpoints, that there didn't seem to necessarily be clear criteria as to who could come and who could go. Was that an issue up in your neck of the woods as well, or did that seem to all go fairly well?

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: We've had to put in these measures very quickly, on the fly. As I said, we didn't have pandemic plans when this pandemic was declared in March. We very quickly had to give advice to our communities on what they could do and what the risks are. That's true of the work of our NAN COVID task team in terms of what measures they could develop quickly and put in place, including checkpoints and barricades, which is something that has proved to be very effective in keeping the virus out of our communities. That's something we need to do moving forward.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: It has been effective.

Have you had any cases of COVID in the 30 communities you represent?

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: It's actually 49 communities, and we did have one positive case in Eabametoong in early April, which has since been resolved, thankfully.

The Chair: That brings us to time.

Thanks, Mr. Viersen.

Now, for five minutes, Mr. Battiste, please go ahead.

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

One of the things that has happened as a result of COVID that I was sad to hear is that the AFN AGA will not be taking place in Halifax in July. I understand why.

As someone who has probably attended all of these AFN AGAs over the past 20 years, I'm wondering how AFN is continuing advocacy and communicating with their chiefs. I know Zoom has been used, but I'm wondering what the strategy is for passing resolutions, for moving things forward and really doing the important work that AFN has done over the years in its advocacy.

I'd like to hear from Regional Chief Poitras as well as Grand Chief Fiddler, who I have often seen at the AFN AGAs and shared wings with over the years. I'm wondering how we see this unfolding over the next six months to a year during COVID times. How do the first nations across Canada continue the great work of advocacy and passing resolutions and working with committees moving forward?

I'd like to hear from both of you.

Regional Chief Marlene Poitras: Thank you.

Yes, it's unfortunate that the AGA has been cancelled this year. We've decided to move the decision-making and the resolutions we need to move forward to December, but in the meantime, as you said, we continue to advocate with government. We also continue to do some of the work through Zoom, but a lot of that really slowed down during the shutdown, so we need to figure out how we're going to move forward and ensure that the issues on which we need some direction and guidance are being received by the leadership.

It's a work in progress.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Grand Chief, do you want to comment on how effective that has been for you as a grand chief in your region. Can you give us a sense, from government, what recommendations we could do?

I know you had an event that was planned in Ottawa that got cancelled a while ago. I'm just wondering. What are your recommendations and what are your feelings on how we move forward in terms of having that communication among ministers and regions and chiefs in Canada?

• (1210)

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: It's nice to hear from you, MP Battiste.

That's something we are also working on right now in terms of our own governance systems during this pandemic. Obviously we have to make adjustments to how we do business, especially with our leadership, and that's something on which we're getting legal advice. We had planned a chiefs' meeting in April, which we obviously cancelled. There is another meeting coming up in August which we are postponing to the fall. We have to reframe and redevelop our rules and procedures so that once we do a virtual chiefs' meeting in early fall, it will be legally binding. The decisions they make will be legally binding and the resolutions they pass will be enforced.

We've had to do some rewriting in terms of our own rules and procedures to make sure that how we do business moving forward is legal and that the resolutions they are going to pass will be enforced.

It's a work in progress, and obviously we have to do that and we'll definitely keep moving forward. That is something we are committed to doing.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Grand Chief, I know you were cut off a little bit when you were getting into the importance of UNDRIP, and its importance to your communities.

I wanted to give you time to talk about why UNDRIP is important for us to move forward on and what it means to your community.

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: Even during this pandemic we're hearing in the media stories about communities still facing pressure from developers going through their territories, wanting to consult them on a mining project, for example. Right now with the travel restrictions that are in place, we need to respect those. Everyone

needs to respect the decisions that our communities have in place now. They shouldn't be facing additional pressures at this time, including from the ministry, to have these inside discussions.

Again, if UNDRIP were the law of the land, this wouldn't be happening. It is so important that this be legislated, that this become law at the provincial level and the federal level—all governments. This needs to happen fairly quickly.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm glad you were able to get that in. Thank you, Mr. Battiste.

Mr. Vidal, you have five minutes. Please go ahead.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As well, I want to thank all of our witnesses today for being here.

I want to ask Regional Chief Poitras, Grand Chief Fiddler and Chief Mathias each a question about education in your communities.

My role is services and that portfolio. I would just be curious to have your responses in the context of everything you had to do to adapt the elementary education in your communities, both what you have to do now in the midst of this and what you're anticipating come fall. How are you adapting to what you expect come fall from a post-secondary education perspective for the people of your communities?

I think it was Chief Mathias who talked about the percentage of people under 25 in her community, in the context of where we go come fall from a post-secondary education perspective.

Let's start with Grand Chief Fiddler, and then Chief Mathias and Regional Chief Poitras, if you would each give me your response to that.

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: Thank you for this very important question.

While we're dealing with COVID and all the safety measures put in place, at the same time we need to look at education because we don't want our children to fall further behind in their schooling. That's what we are working on right now. In fact, next week we're having a virtual chiefs' forum on education to talk about what that will look like in the fall, moving forward.

Again, as has been mentioned before in terms of the lack of infrastructure in many of our communities, we need to very quickly build on this work to make sure that there's broadband and that there's adequate bandwidth for our communities to be able to deliver education to our children. That's something that I want Canada to look at in more detail in terms of how that work can be supported, because infrastructure will be a key piece in terms of how we deliver education, especially in the remote north.

As I said, a third of our communities are considered remote, and we need to very quickly move on that work.

• (1215)

Mr. Gary Vidal: Chief Mathias.

Chief Steve Mathias: Yes, thanks for the question.

My community is in the province of Quebec, and Quebec reopened their schools about three weeks ago or so. We found it pretty premature to do that, so we decided not to reopen our school. Although it's just one school, it houses the primary and secondary school, so we chose not to reopen it.

What we're doing is we're putting in place different measures, putting a plan in place to reopen in September. We were in lockdown. We're kind of in a semi-lockdown now, and most of the teachers come from outside the province of Quebec, so they have to come into quarantine when they come to the community. These are the things that we have to put in place to make sure we don't allow the virus to come in and spread through the community.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Thank you.

Regional Chief.

Regional Chief Marlene Poitras: Thank you for the question.

There are many great examples of virtual online learning for indigenous youth that were presented during COVID, but there's also on-the-land training, and resources were provided to some of the nations.

In terms of opening up and moving forward in September, the issues are social distancing, the need for additional portable infrastructures, increased bus services and of course broadband, so that our nations can ensure that their students are receiving the optimal education that they require.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Thank you.

I think I just have a few seconds. Does anyone want to make a quick comment on the post-secondary side of this at all?

The Chair: Perhaps we'll be able to pick that up. I want to make sure everyone gets a round of questioning, so hold that thought.

Mr. Powlowski, I will give the floor to you for five minutes.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Thank you.

I have a whole bunch of questions for Grand Chief Fiddler, but we talk fairly often. If and when I go to church, he's usually there as well. If I go out and open the door and yell really loudly, he could probably hear me too.

I think I will instead address my question to Mr. Jackson. We have an opportunity to have a very famous Canadian appear before us today.

I thought I would ask you a question. Racism has been very much in the news lately. You said you didn't go to school very long, but wisdom isn't something, in my experience, that you learn in school. It's something that you learn in life and from experience. You, like me, have grey hair. I think you are the eldest of the witnesses before us today. You've worked in a lot of places with a lot of people in Canada and the United States. What have you learned in life about the nature of racism?

Mr. Tom Jackson: It's a constant. What we have to do to mitigate racism and the effects of racism, in my opinion, is that we have to take this word, a word called "love" and create a verb. We need to school in compassion and in empathy, but mostly we could

become the cause, not follow the cause. If we are committed to creating a better environment, then we have to commit ourselves. We can't wait for somebody else to make change. We can't hope that somebody else has a voice. If you don't use your voice now, you may never get a chance to use your voice.

The reason I'm saying that is that we're at a very important point in our history. This is a point where the convergence is not so much a convergence; it's a gap. What's happened is that a gap has been identified. A crevice has been identified, and it has been brought about by many things that are founded in history. We don't have to rely upon our knowledge of history, but it's a good place to look to make sure that our today makes more sense to us and that our tomorrow becomes our today.

It's great to make a plan, but it's better to have action. It's better to have a verb than a word.

• (1220)

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Maybe as a follow-up question, I think you have probably worked a fair bit in the United States as well as Canada. Would you say a few a few things about perhaps the anti-black racism in the United States compared to anti-indigenous racism in Canada? Are they comparable? Do they share similarities, or are there differences?

Mr. Tom Jackson: There are differences in that we were born here in this wonderful country, in this wonderful land. We didn't come here. We didn't sit in front of slave merchants on a ship. We were born here. The racism that I think has become our burden is how our governments, how our conquerors, at least at the time, our parent conquerors, used the gifts that we have, took those gifts and used them, but have not reciprocated. They have not returned the kindness.

A lot of us are still trying to figure out how we got into the mess. Believe it or not, when you do something for 300 years, it's really hard to change overnight, but if we start with that little word, that verb, and we start with that as a seed and we plant it and we nurture it, there will be a harvest, and we can all share in the harvest.

The Chair: That brings us right to time on a remarkable intervention.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bérubé, you may go ahead.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their participation today. I'd also like to thank the IT people for all their assistance. Actually, my Internet connection isn't working properly today. Lastly, I'd like to thank the interpreters for their essential contribution to the committee's proceedings.

I am on the traditional territory of the Algonquin, Anishinabek and Cree peoples of the Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou riding.

My question is for Chief Mathias. You said earlier that you entered a state of emergency in mid-March.

Was the plan you put in place worthwhile? Do you think assistance from the government would have been more helpful? Not only did you need money, but you also needed more housing. How did you manage?

Chief Steeve Mathias: Thank you for your question.

Under the plan, I set up an important committee. The council has 14 members on the pandemic committee. The committee is made up of health care, education and public works stakeholders, as well as members of the council and the community's general administration. We meet every morning via Zoom to assess the situation. We developed a plan accordingly, but the challenge always lies in implementation.

That's where we ran into a few issues. To enforce some of the guidelines and measures we put in place, we needed police help. Certain people didn't want to co-operate. We imposed a curfew in the community, we set up a checkpoint, we developed a quarantine policy, and we placed people in quarantine. When the time came to implement the measures, the Sûreté du Québec told us that we couldn't do it without a decree from Quebec's department of health and social services.

We applied for one and we obtained Dr. Sobanjo's support. She's the region's public health authority. She submitted her recommendation to the Quebec government, which has been slow in granting the decree. We filed the application five or six weeks ago, but we were told that other communities in Quebec were also seeking a decree.

We can appreciate that, but the problem is that communities like Winneway have neither reserve status nor their own police force, and they can't make their own regulations. The people of Winneway are in a pretty unique position. That's why we don't think we should be mixed in with the rest of—

● (1225)

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, but I have to interrupt. These are two and a half minute rounds. It's a good answer, but we went over time.

Ms. Gazan, go ahead, please, with your questions for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I hate to do this, but because I only have two and a half minutes, I'd like the respondents to limit their responses to one minute.

My questions are for Mr. Jackson and Grand Chief Fiddler.

I'll start with you, Mr. Jackson. You talked about the struggles artists are having right now. I'm in support of having a guaranteed annual income.

How do you think that would help artists post-COVID?

Mr. Tom Jackson: I know that right now, because there is no income for artists other than CERB—and if that's cut off—there are very few options. I say this because there is no way for an artist to

make money. How does it affect them? I hate to say that it would be obvious, but it would affect them not just from the perspective that they could go buy a loaf of bread or something for their children. What it does is it makes a difference in their mindset. It makes a difference in understanding that a world of government and people we've entertained our whole lives actually care. It makes a difference to me because it makes me believe that you believe that we can actually do something for you, so it's helping us help others.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Mr. Jackson, thank you so much. I have a million other questions I would love to ask you.

Grand Chief Fiddler, you spoke about the issue of access to clean drinking water. The Liberal government promised to end all boil water advisories. This is coming up in a couple of months and it's very clear that the government is not going to keep that promise.

We're currently in a pandemic, which for me speaks to the need to quicken the process to end all boil water advisories. What difference would it make if the government made substantial and real investments immediately to protect the health and safety of your communities and respond to this basic human right that's currently being violated?

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: You can take anything, any sector, and on the reserve there are no standards. There are no standards on health care. There are no standards on education. There are no standards on housing or water. That's what this government needs to look at, building those standards, the standards on the reserve.

Again, water is a source of life. We cannot live without water, and we need to create standards to work in partnership with other jurisdictions and provinces, to build these standards and to fund the communities to be able to meet the standards.

● (1230)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Now we'll move on to a five-minute round.

Mr. Schmale, you're up first for five minutes.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

I'll start with Mr. Jackson.

I did enjoy your opening comments because, like you, I started my career off in radio as a lowly journalist and a news director eventually. You were right about the pay; it is pretty horrible, but it is something we enjoy doing and that's why we do it.

My comment to you is in regard to the CERB, because we have heard that a few times. I have family members in the travel and tourism industry who say the exact same thing you do, that live comedy shows, concerts or performances will be the very last to recover, the same as travel and tourism, and probably in some cases very late to recover.

In terms of extending the CERB, unless I missed it, did you put a thought on the table as to when you saw the CERB taps starting to turn off, so to speak?

Mr. Tom Jackson: My comment was that because a lot of folks in our industry applied and got accepted at the front end of CERB, that clock runs out mid-July. There was only a period of time during which we qualified for it. We're asking now for an extension of that and an extension on where the cut-off is so that we can maintain an existence.

It's not just those on the stage; it's really important to know that it's the industry itself. It's all the IATSE guys. It's the crews, the writers and the designers. It's all those people who in fact we don't know are behind the scenes. That's a large number.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: My friend Mr. Viersen mentioned that those of us in Ontario are allowed to get a haircut now.

Do you see a slow, gradual opening of some of these places, such as theatres and that type of thing, where you could transition into the wage subsidy and do it that way, instead of staying completely on CERB?

Mr. Tom Jackson: I do see that there's a possibility of its being slow, but as we open up, we have to be very aware of all the things we have to do to stay safe: to keep us safe and to keep you safe. That worries me a bit, although I say we need to get some activity to take place.

That might not be ideally the way we want to have it roll out, but there are other media now. I have a project called *Almighty Voices*, which offers an opportunity for participants to make up to \$10,000 versus some of the options now virtually, where an entertainer will do one show once and somebody will profit from that, but it won't necessarily be the entertainer. There are models, and I could describe them to you and would gladly do so offline, where we can create a better sharing of profits from those kinds of models such that everybody can profit. If I do a show and I have technicians, they would have, at the end of the day, a residual every time that piece showed versus just one time.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Perfect. I appreciate very much your comments.

I just want to quickly move over to the conversation about sport and how it could help with all sorts of things, physical activity, mental health, etc. I forget who was talking about that. I think it was Chief Mathias who mentioned that.

Do you want to expand on that a bit, on any ideas? I think it was you who talked about how we can expand the sport portion of it, in terms of getting people outside, getting them active and strong, mentally and physically, and that kind of thing.

• (1235)

Chief Steeve Mathias: I mentioned that we are lacking infrastructure in our community. We don't have our own arena. We have a ball field. We made it on our own without getting any financial support.

I think there's a need for that to start providing adequate infrastructure for our young people. What they do mostly is more traditional activities. They'll go paddle around in a canoe or they'll go

swimming. They swim in the river at this time of the year too, and it's snowing here right now. You can imagine in what kind of conditions our youth are having to do different kinds of sports.

The Chair: We'll leave it there for five minutes.

Now we go to Ms. Zann for five minutes.

Ms. Lenore Zann (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Hello. How is everybody doing today?

I'm coming to you from the beautiful unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq in northern Nova Scotia. I'm in Truro. I want to say welcome to the committee. Thank you for all of your important presentations.

Hi, Tom. How are you doing? It's been a very long time since we've seen each other, but I'm so proud of your career. You've done so well. Thank you for promoting the creative economy. As you know, I'm actually a member of most of those unions you mentioned and was an active performer for 33 years.

I always say that we have an industry that is clean, green, sustainable and constantly renewable. It's based on the biggest natural resource that we have, which is the talent and creativity of our people. That's why I feel the creative economy needs to be invested in right across the country by provinces, municipalities and of course the federal government.

A lot of my friends are in the same boat with the CERB. They definitely want to see us extend that CERB. They can't go back to work. Whole seasons have been cancelled for the Stratford Festival and Neptune Theatre here in Halifax. Entire shows' seasons are cancelled and I'm told they will not be going back until next February. It's difficult.

As you know, it's difficult to make a steady living and it's difficult when you're out of work, because actors do not get employment insurance. In the States, they do. Also in the States, they make residuals and good residuals, whereas here in Canada actors and writers are offered to sign up and they sign a deal, under which you get paid once and that's it, on and on into eternity. Other people get rich and make billions of dollars with our talent.

Can you tell me, Mr. Jackson, if we can extend the CERB—we have already invested \$500 million into the creative industries to try to help get through this period—what else can we do to help the creative industries, as we move forward, to be more viable and get more money into the pockets of hard-working artists?

Mr. Tom Jackson: We need voices like yours, to start out with, and we need to make sure that we don't put our foot on the fat pedal. We've got to keep our foot on the skinny pedal. We have to keep moving forward because, regardless of what the immediate future brings, we have to plan in real time. We have to make changes. We have to be inventive because, and no disrespect, we can't rely upon that welfare cheque. We want to work, like everybody else. We can't rely upon that, so we have to change our way of thinking and bring others along—I used the word earlier—to collaborate, to sit down with government and say that, if that doesn't work, maybe we can create some legislation that is special legislation, something that is unique to what already exists but uses the existing framework so we don't upset the apple cart. Not that I'm not in favour of upsetting the apple cart, because I've done that from time to time myself.

• (1240)

Ms. Lenore Zann: That's probably why we get along so well.

Mr. Tom Jackson: It's really important for us to think outside that box.

I'd like to go back to a point I talked about earlier of creating a model where, if we're using what is available to us, people other than you or I or a promoter can share in the feast.

Again, if I'm a crew member.... I almost got an honorary IATSE card once. I didn't quite make it, but I almost got it.

Ms. Lenore Zann: You and Graham Greene....

Mr. Tom Jackson: If I were a member of a crew, and somebody was shooting in my theatre, or if I were providing that access to the public, and people were going to pay to see the show, can we not create a residual for the crew, not just the writer, not just the actor, not just the comic, not just the musician and certainly not just the promoter? I love promoters. There's nothing wrong with that, but the reality is that we should all be able to share the feast if we're creating....

Ms. Lenore Zann: Thank you very much. *Wela'lin*.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

As a 45-year broadcaster, I can tell you that, when the government allowed expansion of corporate ownership of radio stations, it almost killed the local radio market and all kinds of entry-level jobs. However, that's not my opportunity because I'm not on the list of questioners, and he has five minutes.

Mr. Zimmer, please go ahead.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Yes, I want to get back to the discussion with Tom.

Thank you for answering some of those questions about what the industry needs. Again, maybe to a bit more of an in-depth discussion of where it's at, I'm a resident of British Columbia, and in Vancouver there's the film industry. Vancouver is huge, and many of us watch the programs on a daily basis that are produced for the world, so we know how valuable the industry is, not just economically but how much it matters to us just in our leisure in our lives. I will say for myself that I miss the theatre experience. We regularly go to movie theatres just to get out, and it's part of our history and our own heritage, and it's something that we miss.

I wanted to talk again about, Mr. Jackson, how we get back there [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] the discussion around PPE and, again, as I framed it before, around this cloud of COVID. How does the industry get functioning again? As you said, welfare isn't something that's a long-term thing. It's to sustain us in gaps and in challenging times, but it's something that we can't rely on in the long term. How do we get back to functioning where we were pre-COVID, when the industry was doing fairly well? There were challenges there, for sure, but how do we get back there as a film industry?

Mr. Tom Jackson: We have to recognize the challenges in front of us and take those challenges one at a time. We can't just throw everything in and expect that the right answer is going to come out.

At the front of end of this, we have to be better at managing and demonstrate that we have the ability to manage such things, like building forts. Let me give you an example. I have a project where I'm going to go into a theatre. I saw on the television the other day children going back to school, and they have to figure out how to respect social distancing, so they got to build a fort.

We're going to go in, and I'm going to tell each of my players, "That is your fort." That's what they have to do. We have the opportunity to make sure that we address our own health and others' health first. Then we have to figure out.... We just have to follow the dotted line. As the opportunity expands, we have to expand, but if we're not willing to explore right now.... It is an entertainment industry. It is an industry of imagination. We have to explore ways that we can, first of all, take care of ourselves, and second, take care of the.... We'll become more successful in what we do if we take care of somebody else first. If we figure out how to take care of them, we'll figure out how to take care of ourselves.

As well, don't just rely, in my opinion, on being an actor. I was living in a hole in the ground. When I got out of that hole in the ground at one point, I was trying to get a job, so I phoned my friend and asked if I could carry a cable. I'm not just an actor; I'm a cable carrier. I'm not just one thing. I have to be prepared to work in other areas that are in the business. The business is a big thing, and there are plenty of opportunities to be creative at a time when you have no other options.

• (1245)

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Yes, that's well said. I started off as a dishwasher. Eventually, I became a carpenter, and here I am as a member of Parliament after a few years. It's funny how it works. It all works out.

I'll go back to Chief Mathias again.

I had asked a question about the communities and ran out of time before we got to your response. I just want to know—and that's the hopeful future, post-COVID—where you see the need in getting the communities back to functioning on that level we were at before.

I know some of the functionality wasn't even where we wanted it to be pre-COVID, but what do we need in our communities to be successful?

Chief Steeve Mathias: With regard to the comments that were made earlier about getting back to normal, for us, back to normal is really not an option. We talk about welfare cheques because that is what normal was for Winneway: depending on the welfare system.

We need to have access to our own lands and to give ourselves a greater autonomy in how to govern ourselves. That's really what it's going to take. UNDRIP has to be implemented, and that's what we should be working on.

The Chair: Thank you, Chief. We're out of time.

Ms. Damoff, you have five minutes. Please go ahead.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to start by acknowledging that I'm on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. I also want to thank all the witnesses for their outstanding testimonies.

In mid-April, Tunchai Redvers, the co-founder and executive director of We Matter, noted an increase in anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, self-harm and hopelessness around youth in communities, and also that youth were turning to unhealthy coping mechanisms.

Grand Chief Fiddler, before I was an MP, I had the privilege of visiting the Nishnawbe Aski Nation with two girls who sent books up to the community, Emma and Julia Mogus of Books with No Bounds. When we went up there, we visited Pelican Falls First Nations High School and met the executive director there, and she talked about the number of youth at that time, in 2013, who were attempting suicide, so it's not a new issue.

Could you speak a bit about some of the issues that the youth in your community are facing and about some of the challenges that COVID has presented in being able to support those youth and their mental health?

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: I think it's also important to note that these challenges existed before this pandemic was declared.

Because we are a party to the Human Rights Tribunal case that Dr. Cindy Blackstock launched back in 2008, we've been able to carve off significant pieces to help support our children and youth in the NAN territory. One unique initiative we've started in the NAN territory is called Choose Life. It was started four years ago after a cluster of suicides in two of our communities.

We were given a three-year extension two years ago, and we have one year left. Every chance I get when I talk to government officials, I always say this needs to be made permanent, so I would ask you to support us in that effort. It's called Choose Life because the issues we're dealing with are long standing. We're dealing with historical trauma from the residential schools and from the Sixties

Scoop, issues that we cannot deal with and address with our children in three or four years. This is a life-changing and a life-saving initiative, and I would encourage all of you to learn more about the work NAN is doing to support it and to make it permanent.

● (1250)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Grand Chief Fiddler, is that a pilot program? Could other communities take advantage of the outcomes you get from that, or is it unique to your community?

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler: Right now it's unique to the Nishnawbe Aski Nation and we've been very open about sharing this information and the work that our communities are doing with other regions, because we know it's making a difference in the lives of our children. We're still experiencing suicide, but not at the rate we had before.

I would encourage government officials from all the parties to get behind this effort because these challenges are now made even worse by this pandemic. We need to give hope to our children and our youth that these programs will not just be from year to year, and we hope there is going to be an extension. They have to be made permanent because, as I said, these are long-standing issues, and it's going to take all of us to address and be a part of this effort.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you for that.

You want that stability.

Mr. Jackson, I only have about a minute left, but I know you've done a lot of work with youth, and you had the Dreamcatcher Tour to try to deal with youth suicide and mental health. I wonder if you might be able to provide some comments on how we can ensure that youth can access social and cultural supports.

Mr. Tom Jackson: There are a couple of things I can say quickly. We obviously need to understand the question. We don't understand the answer because we go into a community, and we assume we know the problem. We need to ask young people what the problem is. They'll tell you, and then we have to react.

If they are brave enough to answer the question, "What stresses you out?".... It's not suicide. It's an s-word, but it's called "stress". If we can manage stress, the byproduct is prevention, but we can't assume we know the answer. We can't just pluck that answer out of the air. We have to know the questions, and those are simple questions: What stresses you out? How can you tell someone is stressed out? What do you do when you're stressed out? How can you help somebody who is stressed out? There are a myriad of answers.

I was in the north and I asked this question in a school. There was a young girl in the back of the room, and she said with tears in her eyes, when I asked 26 people, “Popcorn, making popcorn,” and everybody in that room knew exactly what she meant.

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt at this point, but we need to get in our next round of questioners, which is a two and a half minute round with Ms. Bérubé and Ms. Gazan.

You have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Actually, it's my turn, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

My question is for Chief Steeve Mathias.

I appreciated the candour in your response earlier, when you said you didn't want things to go back to normal in your community. You don't want your community to be recognized as a reserve either, because that would make you dependent on the federal government and subject to its paternalistic administrative constraints, as you put it in your opening statement.

Furthermore, you don't want to give up a large part of your territory, but recognition-wise, you face serious issues, especially when it comes to your community's governance, management and autonomy. You talked about your challenges around imposing health measures and not having your own police force. It took the Sûreté du Québec more than three and a half hours to get to your community when you called for assistance in recent weeks. You want the legitimacy of being able to make your own laws.

What tools do you need to ensure the people of your community—or, as we often hear, the young people of your community—have a bright future? In this parliamentary committee, people's voices are heard. What is your message for your community's future?

Chief Steeve Mathias: Thank you for your question.

What are the tools? The first thing it takes is will. It all starts there. It takes political will from governments, which have to stop treating us the way they have for decades, even centuries. That has to change immediately. We always say,

● (1255)

[*English*]

Who knows best for the Anishinabe people from Winneway? It's the Anishinabe people themselves.

[*Translation*]

Give us the tools and the means, give us access to the resources and the land, and we can govern ourselves and build our own future.

That's what it takes.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I am 100% behind you on that.

Meegwetch.

Chief Steeve Mathias: *Meegwetch.*

[*English*]

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Lemire.

Now we'll go to Ms. Gazan, for two and a half minutes.

Please, go ahead.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Mr. Chair, actually, the time in this round is going to Ms. Qaqqaq.

The Chair: Ms. Qaqqaq, please go ahead.

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and sorry about the mix-up.

My question is for Chief Poitras.

While we are still concerned about a second wave of COVID-19 and still have a lot of physical distancing requirements in place, one of my largest concerns is the delivery of mental health supports. Could you talk about how your communities have tried to make sure people are getting the mental health supports they need?

Regional Chief Marlene Poitras: One of the things I've been advocating for in Alberta is to utilize our aboriginal...like the elders, the health professionals and those who work in the mental health field. There was a move towards virtual, providing mental health services online, but of course the issue is that a lot of first nations don't have access to Internet, especially those that have the addictions.

I'm hoping that moving forward we can have a discussion about how we can address the issue of mental health, because it's huge. You've seen the number of suicides, the number of women who are being beaten and murdered. It definitely needs to be addressed, especially if we're going to be looking at a second wave. We have to find ways to mitigate any of the critical issues that come out.

We've been having those discussions here in Alberta, and I'm hopeful that we can find some good answers for the people, especially for the youth. One of the things that I tell FNIHB and ISC here in Alberta is that we have to hear from the youth. They know the answers. They know what works best for them in terms of addressing their mental health concerns.

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq: Thank you, Chief.

The Chair: Thank you so much. Thank you, everybody. That brings us to time for this meeting.

First of all, on behalf of all of our committee members I will say that we're so appreciative of the witnesses' testimony today. It was remarkable. It touches all of us. We're nowhere near finishing our work. That's obvious. There is so much that we still need to talk about.

That brings me to my next suggestion.

Madam Clerk, if I may, after we suspend and adjourn, could we have the lines stay open to just discuss briefly offline the matter of the upcoming session? We have some inhibitions with regard to how we may be able to sit in the summer, and we had some earlier informal discussions about summer sittings. If I may, Madam Clerk, I'm going to look for your nod to allow us to adjourn this formally, and then have a brief discussion following. Would that be okay? I'm getting a nod.

Thank you so much, everyone.

This meeting is now adjourned.

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