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# Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

EVIDENCE

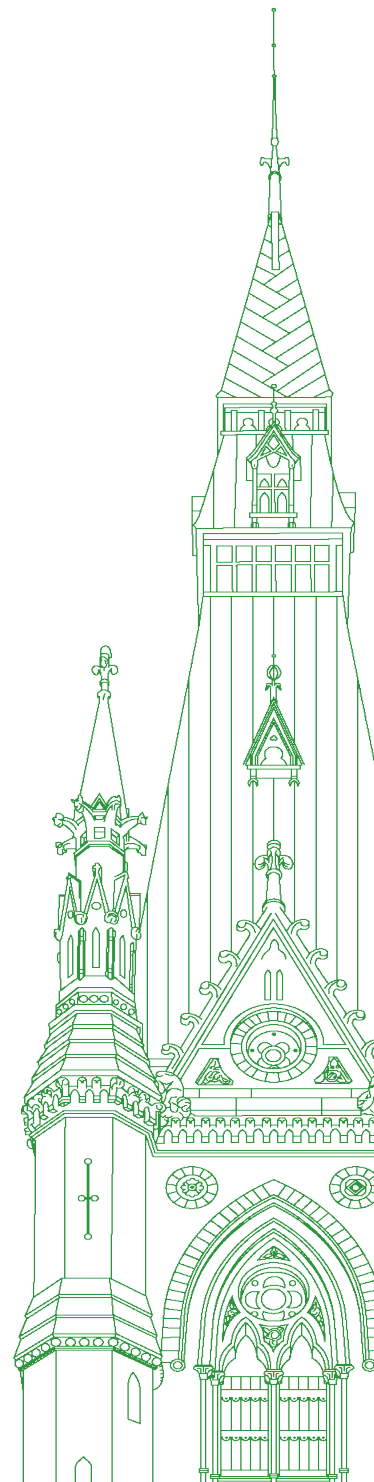
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Thursday, February 27, 2020

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Chair: Mr. Bob Bratina





## Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

Thursday, February 27, 2020

• (1110)

[*English*]

**The Chair (Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.)):** We're back.

I would like to start this meeting by acknowledging that we are meeting today on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bérubé, you have the floor.

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

Over the past 21 days, opposition to the Coastal GasLink pipeline has taken a critical turn. For 21 days, Ottawa has been unable to ensure peace, order and good government. For 21 days, the federal government has failed to meet its fundamental obligation.

There is an urgent need to end to this crisis, but also to understand it. We need to see what is at the root of this crisis, to know the source from which it comes. We need to know why the federal government has waited so long to take responsibility and why it still refuses to do so fully. We also need to look at what is being done to resolve the crisis. Since the government is accountable to Parliament, it must be accountable for its actions on this issue.

The Minister of Indigenous Services has repeatedly stated in the public arena that negotiations were under way with the hereditary chiefs. What is the status of these negotiations?

I understand that negotiations should not be held in public. However, parliamentarians should be minimally informed of what is going on. I am therefore prepared to hear some testimony behind closed doors, so as not to compromise these negotiations. However, it would be highly desirable to reassure parliamentarians regarding the status of the negotiations. It is in the public interest for parliamentarians to be informed of the situation.

It is important that the committee address this issue as soon as possible to make recommendations to the government. I am convinced that the public interest would be greatly served by independent advice on this crisis, such as that provided by this committee.

Since the beginning of the crisis, the Bloc Québécois has made many proposals. First of all, we called for a crisis unit to be set up with Ottawa and the provinces involved. Then, we demanded that, in exchange for an end to the railway blockades, the federal government appoint an independent mediator whose mandate would be to initiate a discussion with the Wet'suwet'en on territorial issues.

In addition, we requested an emergency debate so that the House could debate solutions to be adopted. Through our leader, in a speech to the House, we also proposed that the Coastal GasLink project be temporarily suspended in exchange for lifting the barricades.

For all of these reasons, I believe the committee should support my motion.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Madame Bérubé, would you please place your motion on the floor now.

I appreciate your preamble but for the process, please read out your motion.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** I propose:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 108(2), the Committee undertake a study on the current Indigenous crisis in Quebec and Canada; that it invite the key stakeholders at the centre of this crisis: the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs, the ministers concerned and experts on Indigenous affairs; and that it report back to the House.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Viersen.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I really appreciate the opportunity to discuss this.

In my riding in northern Alberta, the railway is a key part of the economy: forestry, fracking and farming is what we do, and all those products go out on the railway.

I'm happy to support this motion.

I look forward to having many people speak to us on this.

I propose the following amendment:

That the motion be amended by replacing the words "that it invite the key stakeholders at the centre of this crisis: the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs" with the following: "In the spirit of reconciliation and to ensure all indigenous voices are heard, the committee should hear from the affected Indigenous Chiefs, Indigenous local leaders, including Coast Gaslink, so that they can provide a more fulsome exploration of this issue".

**The Chair:** Mr. Johns.

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** I take it now I'm speaking to the amendment.

I was going to propose another amendment, which I'll do after this amendment.

Is that procedure?

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** I feel this amendment is more inclusive. We'd like to hear from more people than just the hereditary chiefs.

**The Chair:** Mr. Zimmer.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC):** I want to speak to the amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Viersen, for that.

I've spoken with many of the leaders locally in the Wet'suwet'en. It's just next to my riding to the west. I was able to meet with some of them about three weeks ago now to talk about their specific support for the project. That was for the group I spoke to, and it seems like it's overwhelmingly that way.

What Mr. Viersen has proposed I think is imperative, which is that there be not just one voice at these meetings, but really that all voices be included, and that we hear a good conversation about the pros and cons for the particular situation.

I support my colleague's amendment and look forward to others supporting it as well.

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.):** I'd like to call the question.

• (1115)

**The Chair:** No. I'm sorry. We can't move to that unless debate is concluded.

Are there any further voices on this discussion?

**Mr. Gord Johns:** We're open to this conversation on the subject. We demonstrated that through our emergency motion, which we were glad to see everybody supporting.

We don't believe the hereditary chiefs should be coming to this committee. It's up to the Prime Minister to meet with the hereditary chiefs. It's not up to this committee to make up for his shortfall or compensate for the Prime Minister's lack of leadership. We won't be supporting this amendment. We want the Wet'suwet'en to do their own business in their territory. We support that, and we don't want to derail that process that's taking place.

We will be proposing another amendment to this motion, but in the spirit of supporting the broader context of this motion. I'll speak to that after the vote on this amendment.

(Amendment negated)

**The Chair:** To your amendment now, Mr. Johns.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** In supporting the Bloc motion, we support all of the text in the motion, but we'd like to strike out "the key stakeholders at the centre of this crisis" and "the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs" and leave it the same, outside of striking that out.

Again, I've outlined through the previous amendment my concerns and note that we support the motion as it stands, except for striking out, again, the words "the key stakeholders at the centre of this crisis: the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs".

**The Chair:** Could you please read the amendment in full?

**Mr. Gord Johns:** The motion would read:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 108(2), the Committee undertake a study on the current Indigenous crisis in Quebec and Canada; that it invite the ministers concerned and experts on Indigenous affairs; and that it report back to the House.

**The Chair:** Mr. Schmale.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** While I'm happy to discuss any amendments, I think this was what we were talking about in our amendment. I agree with my friend from the NDP that there has been a lack of leadership by the Prime Minister and that the government is failing at the situation. We now have people who are trying to derail trains in this country, causing a safety risk to many involved. I think if the government clearly is not going to do its job, maybe we should hear from those involved. That's why our motion had it very broad, so that we can call in these witnesses and hear from them directly. The Bloc Québécois did express willingness to go into closed sessions where needed, to not take away from any ongoing negotiations but to give us a better understanding of what's going on. We could therefore perhaps offer suggestions to the government, because right now what's happening, what we're dealing with, is unacceptable.

Now, as to the NDP motion and what we're seeing here, the ministers are coming in to visit the committee in a couple of weeks anyway. Really, we know what the company line is. We're not getting any new information. We're not learning anything new by bringing in the minister or some people within the department. If we're actually going to get to the bottom of things, we should hear from the people on the ground, the people involved in the situation, before this situation gets worse around the country. We have thousands of Canadians out of work. We have tens of millions of dollars in economic activity grinding to a halt. We have farmers with product that they need to move. We have exporters waiting to move their products and their goods. We are coming to a point where this is spiralling out of control.

Again, if the government isn't going to do this—that's why our motion was so important—then maybe the committee can actually do something.

Mr. Johns, maybe you could reply to this. To me, this motion really has no teeth.

• (1120)

**The Chair:** Mr. Battiste, please.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** I would very much support Mr. Johns' amendment on this.

One thing is that it still says here “experts on Indigenous affairs”. We could potentially call whoever our side believes they should be. I'm just concerned, from my 10 years of experience in working with hereditary systems, that if they are called upon by a committee, that if we name them in a committee and call them to a committee, they'll feel like it's a court that they're being called to. So I would very much make it optional. We could ask them if they want to be a part of this. I also think we have indigenous academics who would be very well suited to be able to discuss this thoroughly and understand the grasp of what this committee is trying to do—not in a confrontational way, as if they're being subpoenaed by a committee. I would not want to add fuel to the fire by saying to the hereditary chiefs, and naming them in this motion, something like, “We're calling you to appear in front of a committee”, which I feel they would take as a threat and something for which they're being subpoenaed.

I'm very much in favour of Gord Johns' motion but would just strike that. All parties have the option to recommend witnesses. I think that's something you could do at that point rather than specifically name them. They would feel like they were being subpoenaed and called to testify. We want to get to the bottom of this, but we really don't want to be in a position where we're making things worse and making it feel like Canada has just subpoenaed these chiefs.

**The Chair:** Mr. Anandasangaree.

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree:** First off, I'd like to thank Madam Bérubé for bringing forward her original motion. I'd also like to thank Gord Johns for his amendment, which we truly appreciate and will support. I think it's important that there is a peaceful and lasting solution to the current situation. Recognizing the limited role of committee in this, what we don't want to do is inflame or derail the ongoing engagements that are currently taking place. The Wet'suwet'en people need to come together and resolve their differences of opinion. It's not up to this committee or our Parliament or our government to impose any type of limitations on that. In that tone, bringing the hereditary chiefs back to Ottawa would essentially derail the work they're currently undertaking.

My understanding is that Minister Bennett is right now in British Columbia. Along with her counterpart in the province, she will be meeting with the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs in the coming hours, if not days. We are very confident that the engagement will be productive.

Therefore, I'd like to ask the committee to support the motion as amended by Mr. Johns. I look forward to having the ministers as well as experts come and present to this committee.

**The Chair:** Mr. Zimmer.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** I just want to clarify, Jaime. I really like what you said about not bringing the request as if it's coming to be tried—absolutely not. I'm very supportive of what you said.

We have a certain amount of flexibility in committee to invite who we want as witnesses, so I think as long as that doesn't preclude people from the Wet'suwet'en, a band in the area and the local stakeholders, then I think we could support it.

We do like our language a little bit better, though. We think it's more inclusive than to specifically exclude groups. That said, as long as we have that flexibility, then I think we can be okay with it, as long as there's that ability to invite whomever we wish as our witnesses.

**The Chair:** Mr. Viersen.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** I would just echo my colleague's comments. Jaime seemed to allay my fears around the experts on indigenous affairs, as limiting it to academics. If it's much broader than that, I'm happy to support it.

• (1125)

**The Chair:** Mr. Powlowski.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.):** I have a very brief comment, and that is that “key stakeholders” is a very broad term. I don't think it excludes anybody.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** That's being taken out.

**Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Milton, Lib.):** But experts on indigenous affairs are saying it.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** It remains the same. I think “experts on—” is broad too.

**Mr. Adam van Koevorden:** The more you list, the more specific it gets.

**The Chair:** I believe we can call the question now.

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** Thank you for your motion, Madam Bérubé.

Mr. Johns.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I'm not on this committee, but I would like to suggest that in the future this committee do a study on the various actions that were taken by the federal government that have contributed to disunity and uncertainty and the attempt to remove indigenous peoples from their lands and culture. It's important, I think, that this committee look at that in the long term.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that comment.

Yes, Jaime.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** Just to clarify, are we talking about the time since the British North America Act, since the Indian Act or since the—

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I'm not proposing a motion right now, but I just think we can have that conversation.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** —Constitution? There's been a long history of displacement in Canada for 250 years. I'm just wondering if you can clarify the scope that the NDP would like to—

**The Chair:** There is no motion on the floor. That's a side discussion. We can get into that, certainly.

The motion is adopted, and now we're going to move on to the briefing by departments.

With us today, we have the officials from the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs and from the Department of Indigenous Services. Each department will be given up to 10 minutes to make its opening statements.

We'll take a moment to get organized.

• (1125)

(Pause)

• (1125)

**The Chair:** Good morning.

Welcome, Monsieur Beaudoin, Mr. Wong and guests. Who would like to go first?

Mr. Beaudoin.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin (Assistant Deputy Minister, Northern Affairs, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the invitation to speak with you today on the important subject of food security in the North as you begin your study.

I would begin by acknowledging that we are on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

I am joined today by Wayne Walsh, Director General of the Northern Strategic Policy Branch within Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, and my colleagues from the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch of Indigenous Services Canada, Dr. Tom Wong, Chief Medical Officer of Public Health, and Constantine Tikhonov, Acting Director of the Environmental Public Health Division.

I would like to point out that our departments are but two of a number of federal departments working on this important issue.

[*English*]

Food security, or insecurity, in the north is an important issue. That is why we're working directly with indigenous organizations and northern partners to develop additional made-in-the-north solutions. Food security is a complex, multi-jurisdictional issue. It exists in every jurisdiction in Canada, with isolation being one in a series of key drivers. Many isolated communities lacking year-round road access rely on goods flown in and have limited access to goods and services to improve their access to food. The general conditions of isolation aggravate food insecurity, as a lack of transportation, infrastructure, remoteness, reliance on diesel generators, among a host of other factors, serve to increase both the cost of business and the cost of living.

Income, education and access to social services also drive levels of food insecurity. Some communities in Canada have as high as 60% social assistance rates, which limits household expenditures. About 70% of households in Canada on social assistance are food insecure. There's a direct relationship between income and food security.

To improve access in the north, the government began subsidizing the cost of transporting goods, including food, to northern com-

munities in the 1960s. Over time, the focus narrowed from subsidizing the cost of goods to just perishable, nutritious food through the nutrition north Canada program.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

Nutrition North Canada is a retail-based subsidy helping to improve access to nutritious food in 116 isolated communities in Canada. Implemented in 2011, the program replaced the former Food Mail program, driven by making nutritious, perishable food more affordable than the goal of it would otherwise be, increasing access to non-perishable food and other essential items, and promoting healthy eating and a nutritious diet in isolated northern communities.

The program provides registered retailers and suppliers with a subsidy to alleviate the high cost of stocking and supplying eligible items in isolated communities. In 2011, the implementation of Nutrition North Canada included the addition of Health Canada and Public Health Agency of Canada retailer education initiatives which encouraged nutritious eating, a key component of a healthy lifestyle.

[*English*]

Since the program was established in 2011, there has been a steady increase in the nutrition north subsidized foods shipped to communities. In 2018-19, over 30 million kilograms of nutritious food was shipped and sold at subsidized rates. That represents about a 50% increase between 2011 and 2019.

Collaboration with partners has been a significant part of enhancing the program since 2011. Through the nutrition north Canada advisory board, information and advice is provided to the Minister of Northern Affairs to help guide the direction and activities of the program and to ensure that northern residents receive the full benefits of the subsidy program. Members are appointed by the Minister of Northern Affairs through an open, transparent and merit-based selection process.

Nutrition north also relies on the expertise and experience provided by its indigenous working group to drive ongoing updates and improvements to the program so that it better serves eligible communities. We launched this in May 2017. The indigenous working group comprises 11 members representing one or more eligible communities, providing northerners living in these communities with a direct voice into the program.

Many eligible communities under the nutrition north program are located in the four Inuit Nunangat regions of Canada. In order to recognize the distinct realities faced by Inuit, the Inuit-Crown food security working group was created in 2019 to promote further collaboration among government departments and Inuit organizations. The working group supports the Inuit-Crown partnership committee by promoting a whole-of-government approach towards improving food security in Inuit Nunangat.

[Translation]

Since implementation, the Nutrition North Canada program has undergone a number of audits and evaluations, with increased scrutiny over transparency and accountability, and ensuring the program's effectiveness in improving access to nutritious food and making it more affordable.

Both the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development and the Office of the Auditor General made recommendations on program changes from 2011 to 2014, including that all isolated communities be given full access to the program, including those south of 60.

In 2016, a massive project was carried out across Canada to gather input from Northerners on how to improve the program. Key recommendations from this process included increased subsidies and broadening the existing eligible food list, support for hunting and harvesting to increase access to country and traditional foods, and support for local food production.

• (1135)

[English]

Working with northerners, significant enhancements to the program have been made to reflect recommendations since 2016. The program announced a fully revised food subsidy list, which includes focus on northern staples and family-friendly items such as milk, frozen fruit, frozen vegetables, infant formula and infant food, all with the goal of seeking to lower the cost of nutritious food.

Additional enhancements to the program were announced in 2019. A new surface transportation subsidy was put in place for certain eligible non-perishable items transported by sealift, ice road, or barge, as well as the addition of feminine hygiene products to the eligibility list.

Among the enhancements is the new harvesters support grant, which really supports local food-sharing by reducing the cost of hunting and harvesting for eligible isolated communities in Canada.

The harvesters support grant is based on a partnership approach between indigenous recipient organizations and the department. It has been designed to be indigenous-led, with a recognition that harvesting needs and practices should be driven by communities themselves.

The establishment of the harvesters support grant serves as an important milestone in response to recommendations from northerners, and it is an important step forward in addressing food security in the north beyond subsidizing store-bought market food.

Together and in collaboration with our partners, some good progress has been made, but clearly, more needs to be done.

While the program recognizes access to market food as an important part of helping to alleviate food insecurity in the north, a true response to food insecurity requires solutions beyond nutrition north.

[Translation]

Nutrition North Canada was established to improve the affordability and accessibility of nutritious foods, and while it does offer measurable improvements, it was not designed to address the full range of complex issues leading to food insecurity.

Food insecurity levels in the North...

[English]

**The Chair:** Sorry. We've lost the English interpretation.

Monsieur Beaudoin, we have the documents. Please continue on from "Food insecurity levels in the north...", the second-last paragraph on page 5 of your presentation.

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** Thank you.

[Translation]

Food insecurity levels in the North are challenging. More needs to be done to improve the broader well-being of isolated northern communities, and engagement with the working groups and the Advisory Board will help find new solutions.

Other government initiatives have been implemented to help address this issue, including the Canada Northern Economic Development Agency, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Local Food Infrastructure Fund.

However, these programs alone will not solve food security in the North. It will require a multisystem approach.

[English]

We are engaging and listening to northern and indigenous residents to understand what they need to help their families, and we're working with provincial, territorial, industry, harvesters and others to develop new sets of shared northern-based solutions beyond nutrition north.

As such, improving food security in the north will require collaboration and coordination from multiple government jurisdictions and stakeholders, and the department is pleased to be broadening this network in support of strong partnerships and collaborative solutions. There is no shortage of resilience and innovative ideas in northern communities. Our job is to listen, work with northerners, and support northern-led solutions.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1140)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Monsieur Beaudoin.

Dr. Wong, are you going to present to us as well?

**Dr. Tom Wong (Chief Medical Officer and Director General, Office of Population and Public Health, Department of Indigenous Services):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Our department has no opening remarks, and we are open for questions.

**The Chair:** Mr. Viersen, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

The nutrition north Canada program has been around for about 10 years, and it probably was designed before that. YouTube was brand new back then, so things have changed a little.

How has nutrition north kept up with changing technology?

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** That is a good question. Maybe I'll turn this one over to Mr. Walsh in a moment.

Can I ask for additional clarification on the question?

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** There was a news story about a year ago about how first nations people who were on Amazon Prime were able to get their groceries more cheaply and more quickly than by using the nutrition north program. How does nutrition north accommodate that?

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** The Amazon system does deliver to Iqaluit. Currently that's the only place on our list that can access those items.

We have put in place things like having access to individuals to order food from the south and to the subsidy using their own credit cards and things like that. Those things are available to individuals.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** On their own credit cards....so there is a subsidy directed to individuals. I understood it was more the retailers that—

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** The subsidy is definitely aimed at retailers and suppliers, but individuals can order directly from southern stores that are participants in the program, hence the reason they can do this via Amazon.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** Have you reached out to companies like Amazon or Shopify to see how they could participate in getting other communities online?

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** There have been discussions with Amazon in the past.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** That's very good.

I'll hand the rest of my time to my colleague Mr. Zimmer.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Thank you for coming today.

One thing that both Mr. Viersen and I share is we live in northern communities. I live in a northern B.C. community; it's not as far north as the territories, for sure, but access is very limited in our communities. Things cost a lot more where we live, but again the problem is even more profound up north.

I have a friend who has started a business in Dawson Creek that has localized growing of food in a container-type unit where you can grow fresh food on a smaller scale and also provide it to the local residents. His name is Doug Young. Have similar types of ideas been pursued in the north? We would assume they would have been, but I want some more specifics.

We talk about the Inuit and indigenous peoples who have lived in the north for thousands of years, and they've managed to sustain themselves in the past. Is there some way we can talk about sourcing food in the north for northerners rather than having to make this long trek via airplane or whatever the method is to get up there? Has that question been asked before and how has it been addressed, past experiences included?

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** Indeed this also came up during the engagement that was held from 2016 onwards. The idea of having innovative solutions in the north is definitely present, and in budget 2019 funding was provided to the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency of \$15 million over five years for projects in the north such as what you're mentioning, greenhouses, etc. Colleagues at CanNor are rolling that out. It definitely has been heard.

On other approaches to solutions for the north, I mentioned the harvesters support grant program. That's \$40 million over five years, starting this fiscal year, and that's to give access to northerners to country and traditional food by hunting, gathering and harvesting. That is also something new that's occurring this year.

• (1145)

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** From what you're saying, it seems like there are funds that are going towards this.

I've been a member of Parliament for almost nine years. We appreciate the money going out, but we also want to measure its effectiveness. You just referred to technology in the north. Has that just started or have there been past attempts to make this kind of localized food sourcing? Has it been happening? How successful has it been? Are we funding something that's been successful that we want to keep going or are we just really starting off on our first step here?

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** What I can speak to is the program the department has, which is the nutrition north program. As I mentioned, this is a complex issue that is highly partnered and requires the participation of different partners. Nutrition north is designed to be part of the solution. It is a tool in the tool kit, but it is not the be-all and end-all. It's a grant that gets to people via a specific mechanism. What you're talking about are interesting ideas, and we've heard them from northerners, but they are being rolled out through a different government agency, which is CanNor.

**The Chair:** Mr. Anandasangaree.

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree:** I'd like to ask the indulgence of our officials here today. I have a procedural motion I want to bring forward in accordance with the motion introduced by the Bloc and passed this morning that this meeting adjourn at 12:45 p.m. and the subcommittee meeting be set immediately after, to go from 12:45 p.m. to 1 p.m., to discuss the witnesses for the study that was passed today.



**The Chair:** All in favour?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree:** I'd like to yield the rest of the time to Ms. Zann.

**The Chair:** Ms. Zann, you have five minutes left.

**Ms. Lenore Zann (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.):** Thank you.

As we've heard, gentlemen, food and security and poor nutrition do disproportionately affect northern and indigenous individuals, households and communities. The main tool of government so far with respect to nutrition and food security in the north is this nutrition north Canada program.

As my Conservative colleague, Mr. Vidal, mentioned, there are interesting programs that people are creating that would help nutrition in the north.

I was pleased to be part of cutting the ribbon back in 2011 in Bible Hill, Nova Scotia at a place called Perennia. My government at the time—I was in the Nova Scotia legislature—built the building, established it and invested in new techniques for helping with food insecurity across the country.

One of the companies that was started there was called TruLeaf, founded by Gregg Curwin, who is still located in Nova Scotia. What he created sounded so exciting, we thought, for the north. It's a system that offers an opportunity to grow a sustainable year-round supply of leafy plants to replace or enhance current sources. They're multi-level farms that can be built anywhere, and they offer the key advantage of growing closer to the market, which maximizes freshness while reducing transportation costs and spoilage. The goal is to enhance the local food supply with a year-round supply of agriculture and reduce reliance on imported produce.

They were basically great big huge containment vehicles that had multi-layered trays of greens growing. They can be rolled out for as much produce as you need. At the time we thought this would be very handy somewhere in the north or even in sub-Saharan deserts around the world.

Has anything like that come to your attention? Is this kind of project something that is actually happening in the north right now?

• (1150)

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** That is an interesting project.

We're trying to look at this with a whole-of-government approach to dealing with these issues. That's important. As I mentioned, the program we're managing has a specific mandate. Beyond that, when we bring other federal departments and agencies to the table with our Inuit partners through the Inuit food security working group, these kinds of issues can be discussed. Then the appropriate department can take that back and see what fits within their programming, or see what ideas we have to help move those forward.

It is happening, but not within our department specifically.

**Ms. Lenore Zann:** Are you saying these kinds of projects are happening at this moment? Can the northern peoples get fresh food

like this? Can they get fresh vegetables that are grown on the spot at this time?

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** Yes, and my colleague will elaborate.

**Mr. Wayne Walsh (Director General, Northern Strategic Policy Branch, Northern Affairs, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs):** What's been happening in the north has been isolated and from the ground up, and there are different realities for different communities. We've heard about the example in Dawson City. We've had examples of community gardens in Inuvik. We've had examples of the containers that you speak of in Churchill, Manitoba. We also are aware of some other pilot projects. Memorial University has a similar approach, but it's more for individual families, and they get boxes. There is a mix of different innovations out there.

I think what's going to be important in terms of the next steps is to look at these as pilots and, by using the newly identified funds in CanNor, be able to perhaps build something a bit more sustainable and more long term.

That being said—and this is the other part of the challenge of the north—we need to look at some of the other factors. Growing food in containers has been highly successful in southern climates, in southern Canada. It's a bit more challenging in the north for a host of reasons, one of which is diesel. Hydroelectricity in the north is produced by diesel, so it can become very expensive to run a container when you're paying \$4.25 per litre for diesel.

When we look at pilot projects, we need to look at the whole gamut. We need to look at other things as well, for example how to take advantage of renewables.

**The Chair:** We need to stop there. We're way over.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bérubé, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Food insecurity is a problem that disproportionately affects families and indigenous communities in the North. Your program is the primary tool for addressing nutrition and food insecurity in the North.

What are the factors contributing to food insecurity in Canada's North?

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** Several factors contribute to it: the remoteness of the region, the cost of transporting food, and the influence of the environment and climate change on traditional routes to the North. Personal income is also a basic factor. Because average disposable income is often lower in the North, this lack of funds makes it difficult to buy food, regardless of its price. All of these economic, environmental and social factors contribute to food insecurity.

• (1155)

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** In your opinion, does food insecurity affect men and women equally in northern Canada?

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** That's something we study in our programs. I think our studies show—and my colleague could add to this—that food insecurity affects men and women equally.

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** How do you think food insecurity in Canada's North compares to food insecurity elsewhere in the country?

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** Food insecurity is undeniably higher in the North, in the territories and in remote areas that benefit from the program. Statistics show that. The most recent Statistics Canada survey from 2016 shows that food insecurity in the North was higher than elsewhere in southern communities for the reasons we have discussed. That is why we have a program for those 116 isolated communities. By definition, they do not have access to a road for much of the year. When they do, it is a winter road or something like that. So they have to fly food in, which is more expensive.

There is, however something new in the program. There are communities accessible by sea or winter road for part of the year. The food that goes to them that way can now be subsidized. Often this can reduce costs, as it is more expensive to send these foods by air.

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Since you are talking about transportation, I would like to talk about certain regions, such as James Bay, Nunavik and Eeyou, where I come from. It is often difficult to send food there by plane, and there are no railroads or ships.

How do you send food to these areas when there are such issues? Is this done on a regular basis? How do you go about it?

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** Normally, there are suppliers on the ground. Stores deal with them and arrange for food to be delivered. It's a solution that comes from private sector companies or cooperatives. They order food and then they make a claim to access our subsidy. We then make sure that the subsidy goes to the people on the ground. That is part of what we do.

So it is the private sector companies that make claims to the federal government to get food to people. These claims are audited by chartered accountants.

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** In the 2011 report "From Food Mail to Nutrition North Canada", the committee recommended, after full implementation of the Nutrition North Canada program, that monitoring and evaluation tools be introduced to determine the impact of the program.

What steps has the government taken in this case to address this recommendation so you can move forward?

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** Thank you for your question, Ms. Bérubé.

It is a key issue. We want to make sure that the subsidy goes to the people it is intended for, the people in the North. So we have put in place a series of transparency measures.

First, suppliers must have agreements with us to give us access to their books. In particular, they must write on their cash register receipts the savings realized by the individual thanks to the subsidy.

These measures are designed to allow people to see the savings they are making.

In addition, we have introduced verification measures. We do internal audits of companies, based on risk and on a rotational basis, to ensure that the subsidy has actually been passed on to people on the ground.

In addition, we hire an accounting firm to verify receipts. Before we reimburse the suppliers, they send us their invoices each month, and they are subject to an accounting audit.

All of these measures have been put in place to ensure that the subsidy reaches the people in the North and to guarantee transparency. In fact, all of these measures are also presented in the form of a report on our website.

• (1200)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Beaudoin.

[English]

Mr. Johns, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Thank you.

It's my understanding that nutrition north has consistently been under budget. This is dating back to 2014 and most recently leading up to your departmental results report of 2017-18. Can you explain why?

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** It's a good question indeed. It's a demand-driven program. We have a list of eligible foods and we aim to have the most nutritious foods so that northerners can purchase them. The total amount of subsidy is dependent on food purchased on the ground, so sometimes we find—

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Would it make sense to increase the subsidy just to get the money out the door and help support those who are in most need?

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** We make adjustments along the way to expand either the number of foods that are subsidized or the subsidy rate, to help ensure that the subsidy actually gets on the ground as much as possible. Just recently, in January, the advisory committee met, because we want to make sure we're expanding the list to reflect.... There is an escalator to the contribution, by the way. It's a 5% escalator. We want to make sure we're maximizing the scope and breadth and that the full amounts are being used.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Have you looked at a mechanism that can be adjusted throughout the year, especially if that money is not moving? Clearly, if you're not spending, you're not meeting the needs—

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** To be clear, when it's not spent, it's reinjected into the program, so we're making enhancements. Some of the enhancements I mentioned in 2019 are enhancements that are due to an injection of funds into the program to expand the scope and the level of subsidy. We're constantly making adjustments to try to make sure that the subsidy is maximized and that the impact is maximized on the ground.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** You've stated the importance of the program to the overall health of the community in terms of how community members are affected by the food they eat. Does your department have any information on this or can you share how a northern diet affects things like teeth or the need for nutritional supplements and medicine?

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** I don't have that myself, but perhaps my colleague from Indigenous Services Canada in the first nations and Inuit health branch may have something to add to that.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** When he is speaking to that, could he also maybe speak to the lack of dental services or access to doctors and how that impacts your work?

**Dr. Tom Wong:** Indeed, the lack of food or food insecurity is a major determinant of ill health. When a child does not have enough food at home and is going to school with a growling stomach, can you imagine what happens to academic achievement, as well as predisposition to many diseases? We know that. There are diseases such as tuberculosis, for example, that are associated with food insecurity.

Unfortunately, the needs are so many and there are so many gaps in Canada in the north. Resources currently are limited; however, I see the opportunities for the future, more opportunities to actually have support for distinctions-based, first nations-led, Métis-led and Inuit-led development and implementation of food security strategies to address food insecurity but also all the downstream health complications.

For some of the excellent examples of pilot projects raised over the last 20 minutes, you can imagine how those can be scaled up and can support communities. With successful pilot projects like that, I see great opportunity for the future.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** That's super.

Going back to Mr. Beaudoin, when I talked about the budget and not spending the amount allocated, I hope the department will look at ways to make sure it is meeting the threshold that Parliament has set out in terms of that money being spent so that it gets into the program and lowers costs for people.

I have another question. Part of nutrition for northern communities includes the ability to hunt wild game and make it available in local communities. It's a very important part of the culture and a way of life in the north. Does your department offer any programs or include any provisions to practise wild game hunting? Has there been any work with communities in support of wild game hunting? Maybe you can elaborate on the self-sufficiency comments you made earlier with regard to hunting.

• (1205)

**The Chair:** You have less than a minute for that. Please go ahead.

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** This is new. Based on the consultations that were held, there was a resounding message that northerners wanted access to such a subsidy.

That is what's rolling out this year, with \$40 million over eight years going to communities to organize themselves to have access to the hunting infrastructure or hunting material that is required—boats or Ski Doos going out on the land, etc.—and to managing that the way they see fit.

Often, that can go back to the community. If they need a community freezer to give access to their catches to other members of the community, that is also something that can be done with a grant.

This is all new and is rolling out now.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Mr. Chair, I'm out of time. If I don't get another round, can I have some questions go through you to the department to get them answered?

**The Chair:** Absolutely.

Mr. Zimmer, we have you and Mr. Viersen on our speakers list for the next....

**Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC):** We're going to switch because they went first, if that's all right. We ended up switching the first slot.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, gentlemen, for all showing up today and presenting your information to us.

I had the privilege last weekend of being in northern Ontario, in Treaty No. 3 territory, and meeting with some folks out there. In a follow-up to that, this week I got a letter from one of the chiefs of the first nations out there. He talks about the nutrition north program. In general, it's just not meeting the needs in their area. He said it's not measuring up. I'm going to try to summarize quickly.

As an alternative solution, he's requesting:

...consideration to defer a portion of the allocated NNC budget to projects that empower us to grow our fresh produce locally. We firmly believe that we can create partnerships with organizations that have developed successful technologies utilizing controlled environment agriculture units.

He goes on to define that.

Finally he closes with the following:

In closing, the opportunity to harness these technologies will create greater self-sustainability for our communities and less reliance on government intervention programming. The year-round endeavour will feed our people and create employment and economic stimuli.

In your response to my colleague Mr. Zimmer before, you talked about the CanNor program and it providing some funding to, if I grasped it rightly, this kind of endeavour. We quickly looked on their website and saw that money has been invested in the Northwest Territories to this point, if I'm not mistaken.

Is there opportunity in some of the northern provinces for that type of innovative solution to the food security challenges?

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** You're right. CanNor would apply mostly to north of 60, so the territories. That's the focus of their program for the most part.

If you want to share the letter, we could commit to reaching out to the chief to see what other federal programming, for instance through our colleagues at Agriculture Canada, is available. There may be things available for this food innovation type of programming. We could get in touch with him and see what kind of programming is available in the spirit of trying to facilitate access to information on these things.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Thank you.

His direct ask is the ability to defer some of the money. I'm assuming that wouldn't fall within the parameters of the nutrition north program. I guess that's the program he sees on the ground and that's why he's asking the question, I would believe.

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** Yes, okay.

The program terms and conditions are set. What we do is meet with an indigenous working group, for instance, to get feedback from them as to what's relevant and try to make the necessary adjustments within the programming. I think what he's talking about is a more major overhaul about shifting part of the resources.

Now, the whole idea of having CanNor receive funding for innovation-type programs was to address those types of things. I think there is such programming south of 60.

I don't know, Wayne, if you know more about that.

**Mr. Wayne Walsh:** I think the outreach to Ag Canada and other departments would be the most appropriate at this point. In our engagements, we're always looking for innovations to address food security. If the chief or other regional partners have some ideas, we're always interested in looking at them for sure.

• (1210)

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** I'm going to drill a little further now on a more local level.

I have a list of all the communities that qualify for nutrition north by province and territory or whatever. In my own riding in northern Saskatchewan, there are five of these communities that would qualify for the nutrition north program. One of the huge challenges... One of the witnesses that we suggested was the airline company that serves all of these communities.

Has there ever been any kind of exploration of partnering with some of those service providers in, say, northern Saskatchewan? There's one specific airline company that is responsible for probably a great part of that additional cost to these fly-in communities.

Have you ever considered partnering with the industry people at all to reduce some of those costs, or is it all just through the nutrition north program?

**Mr. Wayne Walsh:** The old food mail program was a transportation subsidy. When we changed the program to nutrition north, we made it a retail subsidy. One rationale for that was to allow the re-

tailers the greatest flexibility to negotiate their own transportation costs. That's how the program was designed.

Certainly, whether it's The North West Company or Arctic Co-operatives, they have all the flexibility to then negotiate their supply chain system, whether it's airlines or whatever, and the sealifts. We have partnered up with the retailers in that regard.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** I think my colleague from the Bloc already asked the question, but the 2014 Auditor General's report that challenged the actual passing on of the....

The follow-up I would make is that in so many of these communities this is happening, and there's only one retailer. The assurance that those subsidies are being passed on is really critical in the sense that there's no competition to manage that. Is that a fair conclusion from my perspective? Perhaps you could quickly comment on how to address that.

**The Chair:** You have 10 seconds.

**Mr. Wayne Walsh:** That's a fair point.

One of the challenges we have is the on-the-ground perception that retailers aren't passing it on.

We did respond to the Auditor General's report in 2014 with a number of initiatives, including point of sale and the audits. It's something that's ongoing, and it's something that we really need to focus on in terms of the education on the program and the marketing of the program. That's something that we're doing on a constant basis.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair, for clarity on the last motion that was brought up and passed. My apologies to everybody on the committee.

We understood it was supposed to be six meetings dedicated to that. I don't know if that was discussed as part of the motion; I don't think it was. I just wanted to clarify whether that was the case. It doesn't need to be dealt with right now, Mr. Chair, but perhaps some clarity could be provided that it is, indeed, the case.

**The Chair:** I suggest we finish our business here and then go into it, further define it and discuss it at that time. Is that okay?

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Mr. van Koeverden, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Adam van Koeverden:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll start by thanking all of you for being with us here today to share your insights with us. I know I speak for my colleagues when I say that your answers include valuable perspective, certainly more than worthy of our collective dedicated attention.

My question relates to the diversity and the complexity of some of these challenges and the commensurate diversity of solutions in the north. I've had the opportunity to travel only a little to Inuit Nunangat, but I do know the differences in the challenges between Nunavik, Nunavut, Inuvialuit and Nunatsiavut. They are as different as they are far apart, and that's just in Inuit Nunangat. We're also talking about communities that aren't in those four regions.

I've heard some recommendations that could potentially serve to benefit one community here or there, such as Amazon for Iqaluit, the only community that has that ability to order things online. I do recall that article, though. An Amazon Prime account costs \$80 a year and it's only available for that one community, and there are all sorts of other challenges. Certainly, it looks like a model that could be expanded upon or maybe subsidized further.

Pointing to the individual solutions, such as a greenhouse in a community with an adequate growing season, or non-reliance on diesel energy, or even soil in which to grow food, they seem a bit, for lack of a better term, "piecemeal" when we're talking about thousands of people in hundreds of communities.

My question focuses a little more on programs that could help enhance the traditional knowledge base with respect to hunting and gathering and the country foods. I was really heartened to see that there's a harvesters support grant. The people I've talked to do elaborate on some of the lost traditional knowledge base. People often say, "Those people in the north, they've lived there for thousands of years; how did they feed themselves then?", irrespective of the fact that generations of colonialism have totally destroyed that knowledge base. It's not discussed enough that the killing of all the dogs in our generation had a devastating impact on the hunting knowledge base of the north.

If you could elaborate a little, I would like to know how we can help restore some of that knowledge base. I've witnessed elders and children collaborating and talking about hunting, encouraging that knowledge base being incorporated into local curricula, as my colleague Jaime has discussed. When communities can control their curriculum, they often have higher success rates.

As a side note, I'm just going to ask one question and I'll allow you to take the floor after. I have a lot on my mind.

In Halton, which is a community that doesn't suffer from any type of food security commensurate with that in the north, there are kids who go to school hungry. Dr. Wong, you identified the difficulty that a child has when going to school hungry. My colleague Jaime asked about food programs that directly fund, subsidize or support kids in school so that every child or person who goes to school can receive a healthy breakfast and lunch. It's helped kids in Halton, who have a very different relationship with food and food insecurity.

I also know that partners such as the guardians, the Rangers and other programs that bring elders and youth together to restore some of that knowledge base that has been lost through colonialism have helped. It's reconciliation and it's an opportunity to regain some of that lost knowledge base.

I know that's a long, meandering question, but could you speak to the value of a school food program, an enhanced harvesters sup-

port grant to restore some of the knowledge base, and the diversity of the problems and the commensurate diversity of potential solutions all across the north, given that we can't use a one-size-fits-all approach or try to fit a round peg into a square hole?

Thank you.

• (1215)

**The Chair:** You have 45 seconds.

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** It's obviously a complex issue with many facets to it.

I'll just say, I was in Resolute last weekend, and I was heartened to meet a young Inuit man, 19 years of age, who had been taught by his family traditional ways of hunting. He was a hunter of polar bears and of beluga whales, and he was showing us how that had been passed on to him. He was wearing sealskin pants, and when I asked him about that, he said he had learned that in school. I was heartened to see that in the curriculum there, they were adapting these traditional ways, so that when he's out on the land, he's wearing something that he's made himself. He is a very resourceful, resilient young man who will be going to the Arctic Winter Games, because he also runs sled dogs and had built his own sled.

Those are things that are happening in the community without additional efforts from us. It's the space of traditions being passed on.

You talked about colonialism. If we step back and let traditional ways set in, that's what you get. I think that's a good solution.

I walked over—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but we're way over time.

**Mr. Adam van Koeverden:** I'd like to ask Dr. Wong to talk about food programs.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but your time is up.

Mr. Schmale.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Thank you to the witnesses for appearing. We appreciate your testimony here today.

I want to pick up on what Mr. van Koeverden was talking about, how self-reliance and self-determination are key to helping those in the north sustain themselves and move on.

I'm sorry if you have to repeat some of what you've already talked about. Are there any steps that you see, outside of what you're already doing, that we could be taking in order to give more control to the local communities? As was mentioned many times, when you have local people making local decisions, you can solve problems faster.

Is there anything on your wish list that you have in your minds that we could be doing to help solve this problem faster?

- (1220)

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** My colleagues may want to add to this, but I'll say for myself that a recent addition I mentioned is the Inuit-Crown food security working group. That entity of governance is important because it enables us to sit down with Inuit representatives from the various regions and have a discussion around what the problems or issues are on the ground. We then have not just one department but many federal departments at the table, and we can pull in other partners if need be to see what kinds of solutions we can bring to the issues that are heard.

Within our mandate, we have specific things, but when we bring the various federal players to the table, that mandate broadens and together we can work on solutions from partners we're hearing from.

Maybe colleagues have additional things they would like to mention.

**Dr. Tom Wong:** To echo what Serge Beaudoin just said, the ITK together with NICOH, jointly through the ICPC process, has drafted an Inuit food security strategy. They are hoping they will be able to finalize it later on this year with the opportunity of different departments trying to support the implementation of that strategy in the future, should resources become available. This would be something, as an example, for an Inuit-led, Inuit-implemented strategy for the years to come.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** One thing that we're reading here in the Northern Policy Institute is the use of drones and airships to deliver food. Is that ongoing, or is it being talked about at all?

**Mr. Wayne Walsh:** Those discussions or innovations are ongoing, and I think as technology advances those will become more viable, but we're still dealing with immediate challenges. Communities are looking for simple solutions now, but, certainly, we're approached all the time with airships, drones and other ideas of how we can make transportation cheaper, therefore reducing the cost.

One of the things that the Government of Nunavut has consistently come forward with to reduce air costs is to simply extend landing strips in communities that would enable bigger planes to land. If you have bigger planes that can land, you can get more cargo. If you have more cargo on one plane, as opposed to multiple planes, then that will reduce the cost of the food that's brought in.

There are lots of different ways to look at it for sure. We're always looking for innovation.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Would that require another department funding that, such as Transport or Infrastructure, or would that still come from your same department?

**Mr. Wayne Walsh:** It could be Transport or Infrastructure, and I think the Government of Nunavut itself would have responsibility for some of that infrastructure.

This goes back to the point that addressing food security is multi-jurisdictional. It's complex and we need lots of different partners and actors talking together and working together to land on these solutions.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** I agree that it is complex for sure. My only concern is that when it crosses departments, things really grind to a halt, and these people need help. When you're navigating all these things together, the solution takes a lot longer.

Is there any way to streamline this to be a lot faster if that's what they're calling for and we know that's what they're looking for? It makes sense to me—longer runways, bigger planes—yes, of course.

**The Chair:** We're at time there, but I'll allow for a very quick answer.

**Mr. Wayne Walsh:** You asked earlier what my wish list is. Certainly, my wish list has always been to make things more streamlined and efficient. I'm more than in favour of that. It's about looking at efficiencies.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Powlowski, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** Thank you.

My riding is Thunder Bay—Rainy River, which doesn't have fly-in communities per se, but within Thunder Bay there are something like 10,000 to 30,000 people from northern fly-in communities, so what we're talking about directly affects a lot of constituents in my riding.

To illustrate the extent of the problem, I recently talked to the food bank in Thunder Bay. The food bank is sending tonnes of donated food up to northern fly-in communities. The chiefs pay for the flights, but that illustrates the difficulty in getting food on northern reserves.

I think one of the big problems with nutrition north, from what I can see, is that the subsidy is so trivial that one questions the value of doing it at all. Nutrition north showed some slides. They had taken pictures of I don't know which fly-in community, something like Attawapiskat, and they showed the price with the subsidy and the price without the subsidy.

A little container of strawberries was something like \$10.20 with the subsidy and \$10.80 without the subsidy. It's a trivial amount of savings. I can't see anybody saying, "Oh well, I get 60 cents off that basket of strawberries. I think I'll buy that." It's still \$10.20. It's still basically unaffordable.

I'm sure that a lot of money is going into nutrition north, but if it basically means a trivial discount that means nothing to the consumer, is it of any value at all?

• (1225)

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** I mentioned that I was in Resolute last week. Resolute is in Nunavut. It's 3,300 kilometres northwest of here—quite a distance. If you think Iqaluit is north, it's 1,000 kilometres from Iqaluit. It's a community of about 186 people, so it's a small community.

Walking in to the Arctic Co-op there, there was a breadth of products available. This is a community that receives a high subsidy level, given its level of remoteness. The subsidy is adjusted depending how close or how far you are, or how much access you have.

The subsidy in that community—the high subsidy—is \$12 per kilogram flown in, so the price of milk I was looking at is comparable to what you could find in various southern communities. Fresh fruit and vegetables are pretty much the same if you look at the scope. For frozen fruit and vegetables, it also looked rather comparable, so we weren't in the range of the \$12 strawberries.

That being said, though, things that weren't subsidized, like a bag of chips, cost \$13. There's a bit of a disincentive there, but the program is meant for nutritious food.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** Well, it would be an interesting thing to look at then because certainly, as I remember in the pictures, the price of food was basically unaffordable. This was in northwestern Ontario. It's not as far to fly, so a subsidy that is adequate for really remote places but inadequate for places that are less remote may be a real possibility and something to look at.

The second issue that I heard of with the nutrition north program is that the Northern store—a big store where they're selling a lot of stuff—can apply for the subsidy and get it back, whereas for smaller retailers, the actual process of filling out the forms is so burdensome that a lot of people don't do it.

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** We're constantly looking at how we can create a balance between streamlining administration and ensuring that the subsidy actually gets passed on to the consumer. Many of the mechanisms that are in place, verifications of the claims that come in and whatnot, are there to ensure that the consumer is getting the subsidy passed on.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** I have a quick final question. Local sourcing of food certainly seems to me to be the way to get to self-sufficiency.

You talked about CanNor and \$15 million over five years for things like greenhouses, but that's only north of 60. It certainly seems to me that in those northwestern Ontario fly-in communities.... DeBruin's tried to start a greenhouse in Fort Severn. I think a number of women had their own plots. Is there nobody in Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs who has the mandate to look into and be involved in attempts to gain that kind of self-sufficiency within those communities south of 60?

• (1230)

**The Chair:** We're over our time again. Could you just reply very briefly?

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** I would just say that this, I think, would fit into programming perhaps in Agriculture Canada, for instance, that put out its food strategy recently. It has some programming.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bérubé, you have two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Since the 2019 evaluation of your program, food insecurity has increased in the Nunavut community. Can you explain to me why food insecurity rates have increased in Nunavut since the Nutrition North Canada program was launched?

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** Thank you for your question.

We constantly monitor the rate of food insecurity. Improvements that we made recently, in 2019, may not yet be fully reflected on the ground. For example, I mentioned the new harvesters support grant. Funding for this grant will be allocated imminently, in March of this year. The measures have not necessarily had time to take full effect on the ground.

Overall, statistics indicate that food insecurity has been reduced since the program was implemented in 2011. There is always more to be done, and that is why we have round tables with our partners to hear their concerns and find solutions to better meet needs. It is on the basis of these conversations that we make adjustments to the programs. We also adjust product funding rates and the list of eligible products. I will give you an example.

During our consultations, we realized that, as part of the subsidy aimed at nutritious food and having maximum impact in that area, there was a list of foods to make bannock. We adjusted our list to make sure that we included the products to make bannock. There are things that we can subsidize to get them out there, based on the needs expressed to us.

It is through this dialogue that we can get there and make progress.

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** What is the federal government doing about growing food insecurity in Nunavut and other northern indigenous communities?

You say food insecurity is decreasing, but we know it is still going on. It's a process and things vary from area to area.

**The Chair:** Please keep your answer brief.

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** Thank you for your question.

I do not want to downplay food insecurity, which is very important.

It is through dialogue with our partners that we will be able to reach solutions. We have a program and we can adjust the parameters of the program. However, by engaging in a broader dialogue with partners and our other colleagues in federal departments, we can find solutions. That is what we are trying to do. The dialogue is ongoing.

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Gordon Johns, please.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** One of the big concerns we have in the NDP is the knowledge of Inuit culture within the relevant departments. Can you maybe reflect on your programs and their need to succeed, and do you feel that staff at every level of the department have knowledge in terms of Inuit culture?

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** It is always a preoccupation for us to make sure that we're hearing from partners and that we are sensitive to their preoccupations. We look for representation of Inuit within our ranks, of course. That is important. For instance, in the Nunavut regional office we're looking to go to 85% Inuit, which is challenging. We're at about 40% or 50% at the moment. Also we want to make sure that those within our ranks have the voices to be able to share with us. Beyond that, we have cultural awareness sessions,

etc., but it's a mixed bag of measures that we have to make sure that we're attentive to the needs of the partners, and the Inuit partners in particular, and that we have frequent dialogue with Inuit partners and are hearing the voices of those who are within our ranks more directly.

• (1235)

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Returning to my earlier question around not spending the money that's been allocated by Parliament, I'm hoping you have some suggestions of how we get there. Given that there's a crisis in the north when it comes to food security, this is something for which Parliament has set money aside and it's not being spent. It's deeply concerning. Maybe you can identify some of the types of support and resources we as MPs at this committee can help you with, so that your department fully understands the stakes here, so that we can help you succeed, especially the member from Nunavut. She obviously has some local insight on the issue.

**Mr. Serge Beaudoin:** I want to give this question the full attention it deserves. Perhaps I can take this back, reflect upon it, see where assistance could be provided, and respond with what it is we're doing to adjust the subsidy to maximize its use and its impact on the ground. Perhaps we can get back to the committee on the methodology more specifically.

**The Chair:** That would be great.

You have five seconds, Mr. Johns.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Okay. I think we're done.

Thank you so much for being here and for your testimony.

**The Chair:** I'd like to thank the witnesses for joining us today.

We'll briefly take a break to allow our committee to adjourn and then re-form for the next segment, as mentioned.

Again, thank you so much. That was excellent.

The meeting is adjourned.









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