



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 005

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Thursday, March 12, 2020

Chair: Mr. Bob Bratina



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• (1100)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.)): Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

[*English*]

I'd like to start, as always, by acknowledging that we are meeting today on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

Our business today is with regard to the supplementary and main estimates. We will begin that study now.

With us, we have the Minister of Indigenous Services, along with departmental officials. The minister has been given up to 10 minutes to make his opening statement and then we'll proceed with questions and answers.

Minister Miller, please introduce your staff and go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Indigenous Services): Members of the committee, good morning.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that we come together on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

It is my pleasure to be here to discuss the 2019-20 supplementary estimates (B) and the 2020-21 main estimates for the Department of Indigenous Services.

From Indigenous Services Canada, I'm joined by Sony Perron, associate deputy minister, Philippe Thompson, chief finance, results and delivery officer, Valerie Gideon, senior assistant deputy minister of the first nations and Inuit health branch, and Joanne Wilkinson, assistant deputy minister for child and family services reform.

Since its creation in 2017, our department has focused on closing socio-economic gaps and working with partners to improve access to services for first nations, Inuit and Métis. The department works in collaboration with partners to improve well-being in indigenous communities across Canada and to support indigenous peoples in assuming control of the delivery of services in their communities at the pace and in the ways they choose, of course.

Over time, it is our goal that indigenous peoples will have the capacity necessary to deliver programs and services to their peoples, and this department, and my role, will be obsolete. We are working with partners to build this capacity.

To support this essential work, the department's 2019-20 supplementary estimates (B) detail initiatives totalling approximately \$1 billion. This brings total appropriations for the department to \$13.8 billion for this fiscal year.

More than half of this new funding—\$588.3 million—is to support the ongoing delivery of the first nations child and family services program, bringing the program's overall budget from \$1.2 billion to \$1.8 billion.

Members will be aware that this committee served a vital role in addressing the overrepresentation of indigenous children in care with its study of Bill C-92, an act respecting first nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families, which came into force at the start of this year and empowers indigenous peoples to assert their inherent jurisdiction over child and family services and the well-being of their children.

• (1105)

[*English*]

Of the amount requested for this program, \$414.9 million supports the implementation of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal rulings from 2016 to September 2019 related to first nations child and family services by funding agencies based on their actual needs and focusing on activities and programs aimed at preventing children from being taken into care.

Our government believes in supporting a prevention-based system, where the needs of first nations children come first. Funding for the first nations child and family services program has more than doubled between 2016 and 2018-19. Since 2016, we've worked with partners to implement systemic remedies in support of the needs of first nations children. This means taking steps to keep children with their families to keep them connected with their communities and their culture.

The other two major items presented in the supplementary estimates (B) are funding to support Jordan's principle and emergency management service providers.

I'd like now to turn to the main estimates for 2020-21.

For the upcoming fiscal year, the department's main estimates are \$12.8 billion. This reflects a net increase of approximately \$538.7 million, or 4%, compared to last year's main estimates.

Further to these estimates, the department also anticipates funding from any investments announced in budget 2020, as well as future Treasury Board decisions. This additional funding is expected to be accessed through the supplementary estimates process.

This year, the department's main estimates reflect a net increase of \$483.6 million related to the transfer of individual affairs and lands and economic development programs, as well as internal services from Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada.

In addition to this, you will see increased funding related to some of the department's core priorities. For example, these estimates reflect an increase of \$85.7 million for elementary and secondary education, as well as post-secondary education programs. From 2011-12 to 2018-19, actual expenditures in education have increased by about 41.7%. This is reflective of our government's commitment to ensuring that every first nations child has the best start in life and that first nations maintain control of first nations education.

[*Translation*]

You will also note that, in these estimates, \$1.5 billion in funding is set aside in 2020-21 for first nations that have entered into the 10-year grant agreement, including 85 first nations that moved to the grant model last fiscal year, with additional first nations communities that will move to the grant in 2020-21.

The 10-year grant is a key initiative of our government's ongoing commitment to establish a new relationship that moves towards flexible, predictable and sustained funding for first nation communities.

[*English*]

I hope this presentation has provided insight into the department's supplementary estimates (B) and main estimates documents.

We have made, and are continuing to make, important changes in our relationships with first nations, Inuit and Métis. While there is still much work to do, our government's historic investments are making a difference in closing the gaps that exist and are improving the quality of life of indigenous peoples, all while advancing self-determination.

Before I end my remarks, I would like to briefly update the committee on COVID-19 as it relates to indigenous peoples in Canada, as I know you share my concerns about that. I thank those who attended the meeting with Valerie Gideon this morning for a more detailed briefing. In fact, I would invite further questions, should you so choose.

Our government is working with all levels of government, including actively supporting indigenous communities to prepare for COVID-19. This is a matter of the health and well-being of all Canadians. This is a time for jurisdictional co-operation, not divisions.

These efforts are supported through a federal-provincial-territorial special advisory committee for COVID-19 that is focused on co-ordination of federal, provincial, and territorial preparedness and response across Canada's health sector for all Canadians, including first nations, Inuit and Métis.

The federal government, including Indigenous Services Canada, has multiple systems in place to prepare for, detect and limit the spread of infectious diseases, including COVID-19.

In budget 2019, I would note, our government invested \$211 million over five years, including \$79.86 million, as the first-ever investment in health resiliency and health emergency preparedness on reserve. These investments have enabled first nations to strengthen their capacity, have allowed us to establish effective inter-jurisdictional networks, and are supporting us in our work to monitor and manage COVID-19.

My officials are working very closely with first nations communities to support them in implementing their pandemic plans, to provide surge capacity where needed, and to offer technical assistance as required.

The importance of clear, concise and timely communication and information-sharing can't be overstated. We all have a role to play in ensuring that our communications are based on the best science and the clearest recommendations. Factual, practical and clear information is essential. We're working with partners to make this information available in indigenous languages through print, radio and social media.

We have learned from past outbreaks. Accurate information is critical, and we all have a role to play in making sure that people are referring to information from trusted sources such as governments and community leadership.

● (1110)

[*Translation*]

My officials are working with local health directors, health workers and nurses through various social networks including with regional medical officers of health. These medical officers of health are also working with provincial partners in ensuring that supports to first nations, whether they live on reserves or not, are fully integrated into provincial plans.

The department has a network of regional emergency management and communicable disease emergency coordinators, as well as regional medical officers. Together, they advise and support first nations across provinces and lead public health emergency preparedness and response as required.

While recognizing that, in the territories, primary health care is delivered by the territorial governments, my department is working closely with indigenous partners and territorial governments to share information and prepare for COVID-19 and will be available to provide surge capacity support in a timely manner if needed.

While we have in place solid planning, monitoring and surge capacity, we also need to be very vigilant.

Proximity-related factors, such as overcrowding, and other determinants of health can increase the risks for some populations, including indigenous peoples. This is why we need to be focused on supporting communities on an ongoing basis and ensuring that we are able to reduce risks where possible.

I would now be happy to answer any questions that the committee may have.

Meegwetch.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We have the first round of questioning of six minutes each, starting with Mr. Vidal.

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

Thank you, Minister and your team for being here with us today. We do appreciate it. We know you're busy.

I have many questions and, as you know, very little time, so I'm going to respectfully ask that you respect my time with concise answers so I can get through some of my questions, if that's all right.

I do have some concerns about your department's plans. There's an old saying, "what gets measured gets done". Would you agree with that?

Hon. Marc Miller: I would agree with that. I would agree that we also like to measure outcomes.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Thank you.

In the most recent departmental results report issued by your department, if you look at some of the summaries in GC InfoBase, it identifies that 65 indicators were used to measure the performance of your department. Only 13 of those indicators are identified as having been met at the time of that report. That's a 20% success rate. Would you consider that to be acceptable?

Hon. Marc Miller: What I consider unacceptable is the socio-economic gap that exists between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. The investments we have made, MP Vidal, are historic and they are but a start in closing that socio-economic gap. It would be wrong to state that this can be achieved overnight or in one term. If any of my team wants to speak to those indicators, I would encourage them to do so, but this has to be put in a much broader context.

● (1115)

Mr. Gary Vidal: Forty-four of the indicators are considered unspecified, meaning that the targets have either not been set, nor results measured for some reason. Even in the 2021 plan, which was just released, many of these same targets have still not been set. We're three years into this now. I understand your comments about

investing, and I appreciate that, but we're talking of a 66% increase and almost \$18 billion now in your 2020-21 plan compared with 2015-16.

Even the PBO report that was issued this morning says, "it is difficult to determine whether services have improved as a result of increased total budgetary spending." I would challenge you. Do you feel that indigenous people are being well-served by your department when there seems to be very little expectation that the targets will be met, or even set?

Hon. Marc Miller: I think in the global context, those investments, while they are historic and shouldn't be understated, are addressing the cost of inaction that has existed over decades. We have closed the financial gap in education on reserve. That is something all Canadians should be proud of. The results will come, and we know that graduations are the same or above non-indigenous graduation rates when that gap is closed, and when that devolution occurs to indigenous communities with respect to education or any other matter. These are ambitious goals, and I would concede that.

I would ask that my staff talk about those indicators specifically, but there is a cost to inaction and we see that every day. There's also a cost to action, and that's precisely what we've implemented.

Mr. Sony Perron (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Indigenous Services): One of the challenges in establishing targets is that when we are co-developing policies and programs, we also work with partners to establish the targets, which will determine the measurement that we will follow going forward. For some, for example education, we still have work to do with partners to get to the definitive measurement, but the tools and the processes being measured are in place. However, before we are able to publish and definitively say this is the target, we have to have the mechanics done and the partnerships developed with first nations, Inuit and Métis when it's applicable to establish that.

For example, we have put money forward for 10-year funding of the first nations health survey that will provide us with some data. We did the same thing last year with the confirmation of ongoing, long-term funding for the Inuit health survey. Therefore, we are putting in place the mechanisms that will allow the department to report on progress against the indicator, and establish targets that are agreed with the partners.

You've probably seen on tuberculosis, for example, last year there was an announcement on what we were planning to achieve as a target: a 50% reduction by 2025, the elimination of TB in the territories by 2030, in partnership with Inuit and territorial government.

It's ambitious, and we are putting the measurements in place to support the reporting on them.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Thank you.

Let me move on to a very specific example of your targets. The indicator identified as the percentage of first nations and Inuit communities with access to mental wellness services was set at 50%, with the target to be achieved by March of 2020. That was in the 2019-20 departmental plan. In the 2020-21 departmental plan, that target now has been adjusted from 50% down to 34%, with a target of March 2021 instead of March 2020—a lower target and a longer time to get there. I use this as an example because it's an indicator of many of the measurements and indicators in your plan.

Why are so many targets adjusted each year to match performance instead of performance being adjusted to get to the targets? In my world, I always expected performance to reach targets. I didn't adjust my targets to match performance.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Sony Perron: Valerie, do you have any information about the change in the mental health targets?

Ms. Valerie Gideon (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Department of Indigenous Services): For sure.

The mental wellness teams have been substantially increased, but for sure some of the mental wellness teams...and they're all set up by first nations. They are driven by first nations. Their makeup, where they are located—all of that is determined by first nations. Some of the leadership processes to get to the place where the decision was made as to where they would be established took a bit longer, particularly in some of the more complex provinces where many players participate in those conversations. We were also able to negotiate some innovative partnerships. In Ontario, for instance, they are co-funded now by the province, which has enabled us to double the number of mental wellness teams.

Realistically, it has meant that it's taken a little bit longer for those teams to be set up. We've adjusted the target with our partners.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Zann, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you very much, Minister, for being here again today.

I'd like to move to the issue of water, to drinking water in particular. Co-developing and investing in distinctions-based community infrastructure plans and addressing the critical needs of first nation, Inuit and Métis communities includes working in collaboration with partners to identify public water and wastewater system needs, develop infrastructure capital plans and design, and implement management plans for the operation and maintenance of clean water and wastewater systems. I've always said that clean air and clean water are really human rights. As World Water Day approaches, how does government plan to lift all long-term drinking water advisories on reserve by 2021? What challenges do we need to overcome? How is government going beyond this commitment to proactively work on sustainable water and wastewater systems?

Hon. Marc Miller: Thank you for the excellent question. From day one this government, in budget 2016, invested a multi-billion dollar envelope to address the unacceptable long-term water advisory situation on reserves in Canada. To date, we have removed 88 long-term advisories, as well as preventing a number of them. The larger projects, which required buildup time in, you will concede, a very short period for an unacceptable situation, remain to be lifted. We're very confident, with the coming summer...in the coming months to be able to lift a great number of them.

I would remind this committee, because I think it's very important, that as of September 30, 2019, so a few months ago, more than \$1.3 billion in targeted funding was invested to support 574 water and wastewater projects, including the 265 that have now been completed. These projects will serve close to half a million people. These are projects that are complex in nature for a variety of reasons—the geological situations, the remoteness of communities—and we are cognizant of that. We have always looked at the indicators and the constantly moving scenario as opposed to simply investing a large amount in infrastructure in 2016. We were constantly engaged with communities that we talked to on a weekly basis to ensure update and partnership. We knew that, and going into budget 2019, we invested hundreds of millions of dollars into the operation and maintenance of these facilities. We knew that these facilities took work and the dedication of people who are now the pride of their community.

There's a lot of work to be done. That's why I've asked my team to focus in particular on the issues we may be facing right now, so that we're not facing them in the spring of 2021, that we remain absolutely committed to.

Ms. Lenore Zann: Thank you very much.

You mentioned the remoteness of many of these areas. When it comes to the health status of indigenous people, that also plays a large part, as we know. Significant gaps still persist in the overall health status of indigenous peoples compared with non-indigenous peoples. The first nations and Inuit face specific challenges that have been one of the reasons for these health inequalities, including access to the health services close to where they live.

Can you please explain to us what challenges exist with accessing culturally appropriate care close to their homes and how and where government is investing in partnership with indigenous communities to close this gap in health outcomes?

Hon. Marc Miller: I will split my time with Valerie Gideon because I think she would have some important elements to add on this.

The budget that this department administers resembles and mirrors that of a province. It administers health care, education, emergency management and infrastructure. The key areas, to your point, are the social determinants of health. They guide everything that underpins the unacceptable socio-economic gap that exists between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. This is a multi-pronged approach that has to be done in partnership with indigenous communities. When it comes to health care, there are specific needs, as we well know, in indigenous communities. There is, frankly, well-deserved and proven skepticism as to how indigenous communities have been let down.

Working in partnership with indigenous communities to make sure that the health approaches are culturally sensitive is not only important policy, but also affects the scientific outcome of the health benefit and is key in a lot of areas. It's also why the Prime Minister has asked me to put forward distinctions-based health legislation, because we know that the outcomes are better when indigenous peoples have input into their own health. It's almost axiomatic.

The investments that we've made in the last four budgets are enormous, but as you mentioned, there is an enormous gap to close by building hospitals, making sure there are health workers in place, making sure there is access, particularly in remote areas. If there are specific needs in those remote communities, whether you need to fly someone in or out, it is very expensive, but meeting them is key to ensuring that the health outcomes are at par, if not higher than for non-indigenous peoples.

I would just ask Valerie to add a bit of colour on that, please.

• (1125)

The Chair: There are just a few seconds left. Go ahead.

Ms. Valerie Gideon: There's really not that much more I can say.

The Chair: We're over time. Perhaps you could just sum up, quickly.

Ms. Valerie Gideon: I'll just say that we're hearing from first nations that they want to control the health services that are delivered to their communities and to have greater influence around services when they have to go externally from their communities to access those services.

There is funding, over \$70 million since 2018, to support some key projects, including in northern Ontario and northern Manitoba, that are being led by first nations to transform the system.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Bérubé, you have six minutes. Please go ahead.

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

Good morning.

Mr. Miller, you said you had increased the number of investigations in indigenous communities. This morning, the Radio-Canada program *Espaces autochtones* reported that Gilles Bérubé, a Lac-Saint-Jean businessman, got rich on the backs of first nations communities in Quebec. The investigative program *Enquête* re-

vealed that, for over 20 years, this unscrupulous man used Corporation Waskahegen, which received funding from the governments of Quebec and Canada, to build a real estate empire at the expense of his tenants—indigenous people living off reserve as well as Métis people. It's outrageous, despicable, sickening! I can hardly find the words to describe it I'm so heartbroken for those indigenous and Métis people living off reserve.

Here's a real example of how this scandal is affecting people's lives. Take the case of a woman from Essipit, on the north shore, who lives in a housing unit run by Corporation Waskahegen. The unit is in need of repair; all she was asking was to have her windows replaced so she wouldn't be cold anymore. The company gave her all kinds of ridiculous excuses for why it couldn't do the work. The woman froze all winter long because a crooked businessman preferred to line his pockets with the money of his fellow citizens than to show some humanity. He used our money to do that, and we are responsible, sir.

The government has to answer to that woman and to the rest of Gilles Bérubé's victims. Mr. Miller, what are you going to do so that this woman from Essipit doesn't have to spend another winter freezing in her own home and so that something like this never happens again?

Hon. Marc Miller: You are absolutely right. That is unacceptable. The fact of the matter, however, is that it falls under the authority of the Société d'habitation du Québec and the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation; my department does not have jurisdiction over them.

We have ways that we can conduct checks, and we rely heavily on the choices made by indigenous communities. One of the main elements of my mandate is to rely on and empower them so that they can spend the funding how they choose. They have the real-world information to make the right choices. It's their right to make their own decisions, because the money is theirs.

When an issue falls under the authority of a Quebec or Canadian government department that is overseen by us, we have control mechanisms at our disposal, but there are anomalies, and this is one of them.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Here's another case that involves an apartment in my riding, in Senneterre, in Abitibi-Témiscamingue.

The tenant, Marc Roy, said his ceilings had been removed because he had had water leaks and mould could be seen in a number of places. From time to time, I call the people in charge, and they tell me that they don't have any money left to repair the apartment. It's really unfortunate.

You mentioned the Quebec and Canadian government departments, but what kind of control mechanisms could be used to prevent these things from happening?

Hon. Marc Miller: Mr. Perron will answer your question.

I am not trying to downplay your comment. I think that is an aberration and it should never happen. We could perhaps begin a discussion on auditing. I want you to know that, for the funds we allocate, first nations are the most subject to financial audits across Canada. Our audit and transparency mechanisms are very prevalent for the funding we provide. Generally, compared with the rest of Canada, we see that aboriginal people are sometimes audited too much. As I was saying to you, aberrations do exist, which is very unfortunate. We have mechanisms to remedy that.

• (1130)

Mr. Sony Perron: The situation you described is very appalling. We don't know much more than what we heard in the media this morning.

The role of the Department of Indigenous Services really focuses on housing on reserves. Quebec has a very creative and innovative process undertaken in partnership with first nations. Every year, a planning session focuses on non-treaty communities and covers the planning of years to come.

We have even developed, in partnership with the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, a certification process for housing managers on reserves to enhance capacity. As the minister was saying, we provide the funding, but the needs exceed what we can provide. However, we are convinced that local managers will administer the housing sector and successfully manage situations like the one you mentioned. Those situations can concern both external contractors and housing that is not funded by the government but is still managed by the community. So investments must be made in capacity because the needs are there.

Rest assured that we are paying a great deal of attention to this in Quebec, but also in other regions of Canada.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: How much federal funding has been provided through subsidies to that off-reserve corporation?

Mr. Sony Perron: I do not know.

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Sony Perron: As I was saying, this is what I learned in the media. In Quebec, the department allocates about \$17 million or \$18 million a year for on-reserve housing. So that does not involve this particular case.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Johns, you have six minutes.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here with your team in light of this historic crisis we're facing right now.

As you know, we want to talk about many issues, but right now, with the pending crisis before us, we have important timely ques-

tions around disaster preparedness for first nations, Inuit and Métis people. We're going to focus on things that we're hearing.

We're hearing constantly from your government and your party that more needs to be done, and right now, with regard to the concerns we have with COVID-19, the advice to Canadians and indigenous people has been, "Wash your hands and self-quarantine."

So many communities don't even have running water to be able to deal with this crisis, or there's overcrowding in homes. It would help if people could self-quarantine and could certainly stop the spread. Can you talk about concrete steps that your government is taking right now to support indigenous communities facing this crisis?

Hon. Marc Miller: That's a very, very important question. It's important to highlight that there are distinctions, obviously. Indigenous populations are much more vulnerable, for the reasons you've highlighted: overpopulation/overcrowding in housing, health outcomes that are lower than those of non-indigenous Canadians and access to health care in a culturally sensitive fashion.

Regarding the specific measures I highlighted in my introduction, there is the \$79 million for emergency preparedness, and the Prime Minister's announcement, \$100 million of which first nations can access in tandem with the amounts provided in support of provincial and territorial governments.

The specific issues you raise are very, very important. We have not only surge capacity that we are working at internally in providing and getting out to communities, the fact that we have access to it and they have access to it should something arise, and we can then step up—

Mr. Gord Johns: They're not hearing that. They're not getting that message. They heard about the announcement yesterday. I'm just getting a message right now from the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council president. All he got is the announcement. They haven't seen any of this and they don't know what's going on. They have questions and this information has to get out there.

Hon. Marc Miller: You're absolutely right. We have actually reached out directly to health centres and to health providers. Sometimes that information doesn't necessarily get back to leadership. We can work on getting that information there, and then directly to the public.

Mr. Gord Johns: It can't get to the people if it doesn't get to the leadership.

Hon. Marc Miller: I would ask Valerie to step in on that. A briefing was given to all parliamentarians this morning with some very important details, so I'd ask her to elaborate a bit on it. It's a very important question.

• (1135)

Ms. Valerie Gideon: Sure, absolutely.

Within B.C., the First Nations Health Authority is managing the planning, the preparedness and the response efforts. They're the ones that have been communicating with B.C. first nations communities directly because they have that direct responsibility. We are, however, engaging them in every single one of our calls and all of our meetings with respect to the national preparedness efforts. Even I, myself, wrote to the CEO of the First Nations Health Authority last night to talk again about the announcement and how we will ensure that B.C. first nations communities—

Mr. Gord Johns: Would you be willing to follow up with me tomorrow to make sure this message has gotten to the nations in my riding? Clearly, it's not right now. We're not hearing that.

Ms. Valerie Gideon: I can confirm with you, absolutely, what communications FNHA has sent out.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you.

Speaking of the urgency, does this not highlight the sense of urgency to make these critical investments we're talking about...and accelerate your timelines when it comes to indigenous housing and make sure that you have indigenous housing not just on reserve, but also off reserve, such as urban and rural and northern housing? This is critical right now. Is the government looking at accelerating it in light of the crisis?

Hon. Marc Miller: Given the options we have before us, in the case that there is an outbreak and there is a necessity to self-isolate, we're looking at the option of having isolation tents. We're looking at the ability to have increased personnel to specifically address overcrowding.

It is unacceptable. I think all Canadians need to realize the level of overcrowding that exists in indigenous communities. We have made historic investments, but given the timeline that you're describing the most expedient thing is to increase our capacity and to have a sensitive and appropriate approach, in particular to hand-washing and the capacity to self-isolate. We know the communities are more vulnerable. That's why we're dedicating additional resources to that.

Mr. Gord Johns: I'll look forward to seeing that happen.

With regard to health care in indigenous communities, especially in rural and remote areas, the difficulty around transportation is something we're hearing about and are concerned about, especially with the ice roads closing really soon. We also know that 40% of clinics have critical property issues.

What's the department planning for the worst-case scenario in these communities?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Hon. Marc Miller: Again, Gord, we have a staged approach. As the Prime Minister has mentioned, money is not an issue. This is about getting surge capacity in place and having a staged approach. If and when issues occur in community, it has to be appropriate to the community. We have to have that proper level of engagement in a community.

Mr. Gord Johns: We're happy to hear that money is not an issue.

We talked about disaster relief and evacuations, such as we're seeing in Kashechewan, which will be evacuated, as we know, in the coming weeks because of spring flooding. What are the plans to make sure people are kept safe, not only in the process of evacuation, but also for those people temporarily living in an urban centre that they might not be familiar with?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Minister.

Hon. Marc Miller: Can you clarify that? Are you talking about Kashechewan with respect to the coronavirus or with respect to potential flooding?

Mr. Gord Johns: It's going to be a combo because you're going to have to move them with spring flooding anyway. What's the plan there?

Hon. Marc Miller: Again, we're engaging with every community. Kashechewan is not the only community at risk. Should communities be at risk, we'll be prepared to intervene in a way that isn't simply with respect to flooding, but also with respect to medical needs if the tandem occurrence of an outbreak occurs, which would obviously be extremely—

Mr. Gord Johns: It's likely going to happen.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We go back now to a five-minute round, starting with Mr. Zimmer.

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

I want to say thanks to Valerie for giving us a briefing on the coronavirus as it relates to indigenous communities. The only question I bring to you again this morning is about screening. We're members of Parliament and travel a lot. I travel through YVR on a regular basis. There is zero screening. To me, it's problematic when we see planes from many countries around the world. China Eastern comes into Canada and there's no screening.

My concern, as it relates to indigenous communities, is that the coronavirus can easily transmit to those communities if there is no screening process in place.

On the preventative side, what are you doing to prevent the coronavirus from getting into those communities?

Ms. Valerie Gideon: One of the measures, of course, is particularly with regard to individuals who need to travel out to be able to access medical care. During H1N1, that was the source of some of the first exposure, particularly in remote and isolated communities where people travelled out. They went to urban centres and then went back home, and they had contracted H1N1.

What's important for us is to ensure that those more vulnerable clients in particular will be able to access private transportation and private accommodation so that they can avoid, to the extent possible, more group settings.

Absolutely, I do think we need education of individuals about presenting themselves for testing if they are symptomatic. I understand your point about why everybody is not being tested, but that would really cripple and paralyze the system. You are not infectious until you are presenting symptoms.

● (1140)

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thanks.

I'll give the rest of my time to Mr. Viersen.

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

Thank you to our minister for being here today.

Minister, it is well known that indigenous women are by far the highest represented victim group in human trafficking in Canada while being only 4% of the women's population in Canada. A 2014 report by the Canadian Women's Foundation established that at least 50% of the female victims of sex trafficking in Canada were indigenous. In Winnipeg it was more like 70% or 80% and in Edmonton, a city near where I live, 40% to 50% of sex crime victims are indigenous women.

Last fall your government announced a national strategy to combat human trafficking with funding. I'm just wondering if you have any idea why your department was left out of that funding initiative.

Hon. Marc Miller: I think the issue you raise is an immensely compelling and distressing one. It was highlighted most notably in the murdered and missing indigenous women's report. In fact, we can talk about different departmental responsibilities.

The preparedness for that falls under Minister Bennett's mandate. It doesn't prevent me from speaking to it. Clearly, we know from the report that being accompanied when travelling to access shelters is a key awareness in communities and of capital importance. Given the statistics you raised, and it is clear in the public mind that we need to address these issues on a community-wide basis. That includes clear issues with respect to policing, which is mentioned in my mandate letter and Minister Blair's mandate letter, and issues with respect to accompaniment in various medical situations when women are most vulnerable and when travelling. This is something we have addressed. There is also the need for an increased number of shelters on and off reserve, which we've proceeded to invest in and will continue to do so.

This is a multi-pronged approach because of the precarity of indigenous women in particular to the violence that accompanies and is characteristic of human trafficking. It is one of the issues that we have focused quite heavily on in our upcoming action plan, but also as a whole-of-government approach to address this entirely unacceptable situation.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Earlier this week the all-party group to end modern day slavery and human trafficking, which I co-chair, hosted a panel of experts and survivors. One of the panellists was Diane Redsky. She is the executive director of an NGO that operates the only traditional healing lodge in Canada for the victims of sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. The national inquiry on murdered and missing indigenous women and girls, which you mentioned,

urged funding for these kinds of support services for indigenous women and girls to help them escape. I'm wondering if there is any funding from your department to aid this healing lodge.

The Chair: We are right at our time. Answer briefly, or we can pick it up in a later round.

Hon. Marc Miller: There is broad funding. I think people should await the action plan, but even before the action plan is announced this coming summer, there has been money invested in a number of these initiatives.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Battiste, you have five minutes.

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

Welcome, Minister Miller.

I was pleased to hear that we have an increase of \$86 million going to education. My question will be about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and funding education for that. I want to quote Murray Sinclair when he said, "While Indigenous children are being mistreated in residential schools by being told they were heathens, savages and pagans and inferior people—that same message is being delivered in the public schools of this country."

While on-reserve education is important, we need to invest in capital. I was there this summer when AFN passed a treaty education resolution calling for a 10-year strategy to promote that across Canada. We've seen places like Saskatchewan that have mandated mandatory treaty education.

What is our government doing to address the TRC's calls to action on all of the education pieces? Also, how are we working with indigenous partners to ensure that resources and training are being developed for teachers? How are we working with our provincial counterparts who control education to make sure that every schoolchild in Canada learns about reconciliation, residential schools and inherent and treaty rights?

● (1145)

Hon. Marc Miller: MP Battiste, you raise a very important aspect of the mandate that isn't necessarily written in my mandate letter, which is making sure that non-indigenous Canadians are part of this and educating all of Canada as to the issues that have underpinned and marred the relationship and prevented it, in some ways, from moving forward. Education and communicating to non-indigenous Canadians that this is part of who we are and part of our identity is key.

I want to salute your initiative and your dedication to doing this, even before you were an MP. It is key to moving this forward. If we're only doing it among leadership, we're not exactly succeeding. We may be advancing, but we're not succeeding. It has to be among peoples. That's the main reminder that all of us need to take home.

In terms of funds, I think you'll note that in the 2021 main estimates, the amount for elementary and secondary education was \$2 billion. Financially, as I mentioned in my introductory remarks, we've closed the gap in education. It's a very important social determinant of health, and key to closing the educational aspect of the socio-economic gap. With that, the success rates are amazing. There are amazing stories about indigenous children—who should never have been in that situation—in control of their educational system. You highlighted that.

There's a very tainted history, as everyone knows, with the educational system and residential schools for indigenous children. When controlled and administered in a culturally appropriate way that is sensitive to community needs, the outcomes are the same if not better. The experience with the Mi'kmaq is one example—hopefully, one of many.

These are key to who we are and key to whom we believe we are as a nation, but more importantly also as a community, making sure that we don't fail another generation of indigenous children.

I mentioned the financial support. I think it's for all to see in the main estimates. I won't go on further about that, but it's making sure that education is done in the language and is culturally appropriate. It isn't simply something you do on a Friday afternoon when everyone's tired. It's a core part of the education. It's key.

It's key to—what people use as a catchphrase but a very important one—“decolonizing”. It's about realizing what the history of Canada and indigenous peoples is. With that comes power. With that comes confidence and success, in the way that first nations dictate the pace. Obviously, uncertainty comes with that, but that's fine. It's a sign of who we are and how we move that relationship forward.

As well, educating—and you touched on that—non-indigenous Canadians is essential. It's why some of the truth and reconciliation reports touched on private actors like institutions—university institutions—in endorsing language courses. Everyone needs to realize that we're all on the same land, and no one's going anywhere, but if we want to advance the relationship, it has to be done with mutual respect, co-operation and friendship.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, if you like.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Okay, I'll be quick with this.

Just in terms of COVID-19, do first nations communities right now have the ability to test in their health centres?

Ms. Valerie Gideon: Yes. It's a swab that you can take, and then it's sent to a provincial lab, in most cases. It can be confirmed through the National Microbiology Laboratory.

I hope you didn't mind that I answered.

The Chair: That's great. Thanks very much.

Mr. Schmale, you have five minutes.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Actually, it will be Gary Vidal again.

The Chair: Gary, please go ahead.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You talk a lot about historic investments. I want to make it clear that I'm not opposed to making investments in indigenous communities. My concern is that we have accountability and that we are doing the best that we can, when I talk about the measures, the indicators and some of those kinds of things.

In the 2018 departmental plan, FTEs for 2021 were planned to be 3,740 people. In 2019-20 that increased to 4,248, and now for 2021, it's up to 5,538 people in your department. That's almost 1,800 FTEs, or a pretty significant percentage.

In your departmental plan, you also talk about your work supporting self-determination of indigenous peoples so that in the future the services you offer are developed, governed and delivered by indigenous peoples.

Again, this morning I heard you talk about working yourself out of a job, and I totally get where you're coming from on that.

Included in this increase in FTEs is an increase for internal services, from 685 people to 1,366. That's like doubling the internal services FTEs. I would suggest to you that Canadians who are struggling to make ends meet would consider that excessive, especially given your goal of working yourself out of a job. I'm not sure many would object to the fact that those resources got to the ground in first nations communities, but when we're doubling our FTEs within the bureaucracy in Ottawa, that would be my struggle. I'm just curious to see if you think that's appropriate and what your response to that would be.

• (1150)

Hon. Marc Miller: I acknowledge how hard you're working to get me out of a job.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Marc Miller: I admire the game, not necessarily the results, but you'll appreciate that I'm doing the same thing.

I think we have to compare apples with apples here. It's key, because it leads into the statement you made.

A number of the FTEs reflect the transfer from the first nations and Inuit health branch from Health Canada as part of the disaggregation, not only of Crown-Indigenous Relations but Indigenous Services Canada, and making sure that first nations health is treated in a culturally appropriate way. So it came under my ministry. We need to reflect that, as well.

As to the other numbers, I guess what we would say is that the penetration rate of the funds into the communities is very, very high. I would like to turn to them, but I will turn to my officials to give you a little more clarity on that.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Before you do, I get your response on the change of the departments, but overall, there are still about 650 people added to the combined department. I would keep that in mind in the response.

Mr. Sony Perron: Most of the increase is coming from the transfer from Health Canada. If you look at their numbers, you will see a diminution of the first nations health branch plus a bit more than 300 employees coming from their internal services who made up the growth in the department.

Right now, we are looking at the program ratio between internal services and program management. We are below 4% to 5%. This is in fact a ratio that is better than when INAC was managing these services. Our ratio is really thin. It's around 1% internal services spending overall, and around 3% program management. The rest goes directly to communities through transfers, or to organizations out there to deliver the services, or for direct payment for services like drugs and dental care. The department is very lean.

With regard to our ratio of administrative costs versus operations, when it was under INAC, we were talking about something around 40-something per cent. Now if I remember well, we are running at about 29%.

At Indigenous Services Canada, I'm pleased to share with you... I think it's all right to be concerned about numbers and federal employees doing this work with a mandate like we have, but you should be happy to hear that we are close to having 30% of our staff being indigenous people working within the department. A lot of them are executives or are on the ground working.

We are also making progress in terms of representation. If we want to get rid of this department over time, we need to build a workforce that can help us to transform and transfer the services, like we did in British Columbia, for example.

The Chair: You have half a minute. Go ahead.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Thank you. I appreciate that.

I have one other very specific question.

On one of your measures, the percentage of first nation and Inuit adults who reported being in very good or excellent health in the 2021 plan... You reduced this target from 50% to 44%, and this has an expected date of achievement of 2028. That is eight years down the road.

Are we adjusting the targets to match our performance? Are we working hard to achieve those targets? That target is a long way down the road.

The Chair: Briefly, go ahead.

Ms. Valerie Gideon: I will speak to it.

The source of that information is the first nations regional longitudinal health survey. It's cyclical, over a four- or five-year period. That is the reason. However, that is a first nations data source that's entirely controlled and driven by first nations. That indicator is crafted by first nations to the First Nations Information Governance Centre.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Powlowski, for a final round of five minutes.

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

H1N1, which was the last COVID-19-like virus to go around, disproportionately affected people in northern indigenous communities for the reasons you mentioned, probably the usual social determinants of health, lack of water, overcrowding, those kinds of things. However, I think there was probably also a genetic component. Being a doctor in Thunder Bay regional hospital at the time, we had a lot of ICU beds occupied by people from northern communities. There were young people who got H1N1 and were ill enough that they had to be intubated and put on a ventilator.

The ultimate concern with COVID-19 is the proportion of people who have more serious illnesses. The answer to that, if you're in one of the northern fly-in communities, is to fly them out. In the case of an epidemic, you're probably going to need more planes, better transportation systems. Is that being considered and prepared for?

● (1155)

Hon. Marc Miller: I'd ask Valerie to answer that.

Ms. Valerie Gideon: Air ambulance services are done through provincial governments. Particularly in northern Ontario, it's entirely the Ornge contract. That is entirely an Ontario contract. That speaks to the absolute importance of ensuring that provincial and territorial governments, particularly provincial governments, are factoring in first nations communities in their pandemic planning, because what our department can influence is what's local or in the community, which will not be sufficient at all in response to COVID-19.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Some people in certain provinces seem to have provincial governments that are maybe less responsive to their communities' social and health needs than other provinces are to their own. I won't mention any particular provinces.

What can you do for people who may be in a province like, speculatively speaking, Ontario, who may be concerned about their provincial government's lack of responsiveness to something like this, to ensure that people in those northern indigenous communities aren't left out because of a provincial government that maybe isn't as proactive as we might like?

Hon. Marc Miller: To the extent that the services and administration haven't been involved—like in FNHA or in territories—we have had an excellent response rate from provinces. We have joint protocols in many measures to augment and coordinate among each other. You don't want authorities tripping over each other. With responsible leadership, I think everyone is cognizant of the fact that we have to rely on science and to check our operational controls and our capacity to surge.

I won't speculate as to unwillingness. I think everyone is on the same page and knows the emergency and urgency of this pandemic and at the very least how to slow it. There is good to very good communication among governments to ensure that communities in need get the services they need when they need them. Should they not, we are prepared to step in aggressively.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: I want to change gear and ask about water supply.

There seems to be an issue with sudden, unpredicted problems with the water supply and the inability to respond quickly to that. For example, the Neskantaga First Nation in northern Ontario was evacuated earlier this year because of a sudden problem with the water supply.

I've heard this wasn't the case, that there wasn't an inventory of what each first nations community had in their water purification system. When there was a problem, the people in Thunder Bay, for example, who were providing the solutions, didn't know what equipment they had up there. They suggested there ought to be some sort of inventory so that Indigenous Affairs—though I'm not sure who it would be—would know which community has what equipment, so that when there's a problem they're able to rapidly respond.

The second part is that some rapid water purification systems are available. Have you contemplated trying to see if we could use them to respond to these emergencies so they didn't have to do things like evacuate communities?

The Chair: You just have a few seconds. Please, go ahead.

Hon. Marc Miller: We have a wide variety of measures we can put in place when these issues arise. The very strict standards around water are such that issues arise more frequently. Correspondingly, we respond quickly. If you look at what happened in Fort Severn, we're working quite quickly to thaw the pipe that froze.

These things do arise, and we're ready to act quite quickly.

As to the inventory, if we have a second, I'll let my staff respond to the inventory.

The Chair: Okay, very quickly.

Mr. Sony Perron: We have a good knowledge of recently replaced or built systems. Sometimes additions or changes are made

to old systems and our staff are not aware of that. Often when there is a problem, someone with the technical expertise needs to go there to determine the source of the problem. Is it the pump, the filtration system, a maintenance issue?

So at a distance, we have some information. But to be really honest, when no diagnostics can be done at the local level, we sometimes have to fly someone into the community to try to determine the nature of the problem and the potential immediate and long-term solutions.

● (1200)

The Chair: Minister Miller and staff, thank you very much.

We've come to the end of this first session. Another important one is coming up.

Thanks to our committee for moving things along. We got lots of answers.

We'll suspend briefly to set up our next meeting.

● (1200)

(Pause)

● (1205)

The Chair: Welcome again, everyone, as we continue on with this meeting of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

The Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and the Minister of Northern Affairs are both here with us today, and they get 10 minutes each to make opening statements. Then we'll proceed with questions and answers.

I will remind the committee that we do have committee business following the vote on the supplementary estimates after we finish today.

Minister Bennett, would you like to go ahead first?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations): For sure, and I think because it's the two of us, we've really only planned on five minutes each so that you will have a longer time for questions, if that's okay.

The Chair: The committee would like that, I'm sure.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: However, if I go to five minutes and 10 seconds, you'll understand?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's good to be back.

Again, as we gather here today, we want to begin by acknowledging that we come together on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

Today, as you know, we're presenting on the 2019-20 supplementary estimates (B) and the 2020-21 main estimates for Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, CIRNAC.

[*Translation*]

I will present on portions related to my work as Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations.

[*English*]

I'm joined by Daniel Watson, deputy minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada; and Annie Boudreau, our new chief of finance, who is also a results and delivery officer.

As you know, CIRNAC is focused on renewing the nation-to-nation, Inuit-Crown, and government-to-government relationships between Canada and first nations, Inuit and Métis. At the core of my mandate is redressing historical wrongs and supporting the acceleration of first nations, Inuit and Métis visions of self-determination.

The department's 2019-20 supplementary estimates (B) presents initiatives totalling approximately \$1 billion, and this brings the total appropriations for the department to \$7.1 billion. Almost all of this funding—\$919 million—is dedicated to the forgiveness of indigenous groups' outstanding comprehensive land claim negotiation loan debt.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

Eliminating this loan debt removes a long-standing barrier to concluding comprehensive land claim agreements.

[*English*]

This also signals Canada's commitment to furthering a rights-recognition approach and to concluding these processes in good faith. In fact, indigenous groups that go on to conclude comprehensive land claim agreements will benefit from increased settlement amounts, as these loans would no longer be deducted from the final settlement. Forgiveness of this debt will also provide additional funds, which can be invested in community priorities, such as closing the socio-economic gaps or supporting economic development initiatives.

These supplementary estimates also access \$17.5 million to implement the recommendations of the Qikiqtani Truth Commission's report. This funding will support the design, initiation and long-term viability of programming by the Qikiqtani Inuit Association to implement the Qikiqtani Truth Commission's final report recommendations.

I'll now move on to the main estimates. CIRNAC's estimates for 2020-21 will be approximately \$4.9 billion.

[*Translation*]

I do want to highlight that the main estimates, as I think most of you know, are the total of all funding that has already been approved by the Treasury Board.

[*English*]

This is not an estimate of the total spending for the year. It's just what has already been approved by Treasury Board. For instance,

we have yet to see the spending that will be outlined in budget 2020.

The Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Act came into effect on July 15, 2019, establishing CIRNAC. The fiscal year 2020-21 will be the first main estimates for the new department. The former department's 2019-20 main estimates were \$7 billion, while CIRNAC's total main estimates budget for 2020-21 is \$4.9 billion.

The apparent net decrease of \$2.1 billion reflects a number of settlements that were paid in the current fiscal year with one-time payments and a transfer of \$483.6 million to Indigenous Services Canada, which now is primarily responsible for individual affairs and lands and economic development programs.

This actually reflects a tremendous success with the resolution of long-standing historical wrongs, including the sixties scoop and the McLean day school settlements.

You will see from our main estimates that, for 2020-21, we are putting forth a strong focus and increased spending on negotiation, settlement and implementation of comprehensive claims and self-government agreements.

[*Translation*]

I would now be happy to take your questions.

Meegwetch.

[*English*]

The Chair: Would Mr. Vandal like to do his presentation?

Hon. Dan Vandal (Minister of Northern Affairs): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss our government's supplementary estimates for the 2019-20 fiscal year, as well as the main estimates for 2020-21 for the Northern Affairs component of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs.

[*Translation*]

I want to begin by acknowledging that we are meeting on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

After a brief presentation, I would be happy to answer any questions from the committee members.

[English]

These estimates reflect our government's commitment to creating greater economic growth and a higher quality of life in Canada's north and Arctic in a fiscally responsible manner. I am confident that these estimates demonstrate our government's plan to develop long-term opportunities that protect Canada's rich natural environment and build healthier communities while also protecting the rights and the interests of indigenous peoples.

The supplementary estimates include an additional investment of \$12.5 million for Nutrition North Canada, including \$8 million to create a harvester support grant, which is designed to be indigenous led and will promote local harvesting of foods for distribution to more than 100 isolated communities.

We are continuing to work in partnership with key stakeholders and partners to ensure that the unique interests, priorities and circumstances of all northerners are acknowledged. In fact, we've seen first-hand how direct engagement with indigenous and community partners has resulted in significant improvements to the nutrition north program in 2018 and 2019.

• (1215)

[Translation]

We are always ready to listen to northerners on the importance of traditional food and on the way to better deal with the growing costs of hunting and harvesting in isolated communities. In addition to the health benefits of fresh local products, the participation in hunting and harvesting activities is an essential element of community well-being and cultural continuity.

[English]

In all, the main estimates include \$530 million in spending related to the Northern Affairs component of the department. An amount of \$108.5 million for Nutrition North Canada is included in the main estimates to continue this important initiative next fiscal year. This funding will address increased subsidy rates and a growing list of subsidized items that includes more culturally relevant and family-friendly items such as the ingredients important for making bannock, as well as infant formula and diapers.

Almost one half of the main estimates total—\$253.5 million—is allocated to the ongoing work of the northern contaminated sites program. This includes the funding of the northern abandoned mine reclamation program announced in budget 2019.

As the committee is aware, the Government of Canada is responsible for the management of a portfolio of contaminated sites across the north, the result of private sector mining exploration and resource development activities that were abandoned by their former operators when they became insolvent. These complex projects present serious ongoing risks to the environment as well as human health and safety. The Government of Canada has accepted fiscal responsibility for this historical contamination and is legally obliged to manage these sites.

Together, these and other initiatives, including \$52.1 million for climate change adaptation, clean energy and other measures to enhance environmental sustainability are intended to ensure northern

lands and waters are healthy for future generations, while helping to secure jobs for northerners and indigenous partners.

In closing, I would note that \$96.6 million for northern and Arctic governance and partnerships and \$18.4 million for northern regulatory and legislative frameworks are also included in the main estimates. These funds will support the implementation of the Arctic and northern policy framework, including co-development and implementation of an Inuit Nunangat policy as we work towards the full implementation of Inuit land claims agreements.

[Translation]

I thank you for the time you have given me this morning, and I would now be pleased to answer any questions from the committee members.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ministers.

We go now, in our six-minute round, to Mr. Schmale.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, Ministers, for your appearance again at committee. It's always a pleasure.

Minister Bennett, I'll start with you. In the last paragraph of your remarks, you say:

You will see from our main estimates that for 2020-21, we are putting a strong focus on and increased spending for negotiation, settlement and implementation of comprehensive claims and self-government agreements.

If I look to your main estimates here, on page 62, there's about \$2 billion here for grants to first nations to settle specific claims, to your comment.

I'm just curious, and maybe you could clarify for me. Is this money set aside to actually settle these claims or is it more for lawyers and consultants and that kind of thing?

That's just a point for clarification.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: That money is to settle the claims. In the new process, we have nation-rebuilding money; we have negotiation-preparation money, and we have the money that supports nations in their discussions with Canada. As you know, in the past, those things were done through loans, as we explained before. Then when the claim was settled, Canada took back the money that was in the loan. The frustration was that they spent 20 years to be \$30 million in debt, and then \$30 million was taken away from what ended up being the comprehensive claim settlement.

Now the money that's set aside for settlements is actually for the settlements, and we, as Canada, believe that now our job is to support the financing of those conversations.

• (1220)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Okay. I'm actually glad to hear that.

Is there any way to isolate how much is for the negotiations, or what the breakdown of that \$2.2 billion is? I just want to be 100% clear on that.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Sure, go ahead.

Mr. Daniel Watson (Deputy Minister, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs): To the extent that it involves departmental staff that would be travelling or being paid salaries, that would be captured in our operating monies, so it's inside the operating budget of the department and not included in this specific claims.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Okay, perfect. Thank you for that clarification.

If the numbers I'm reading are correct, we're looking at about a 66% increase in overall funding since 2015-16. But the PBO report out this morning on the estimates is saying that "It is difficult to determine whether services have improved as a result of increased total budgetary spending."

Do you have any indicators to refute that in terms of the fact that the PBO is saying that increased budgetary allotments don't actually improve on-reserve living?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: As we were explaining, some of the increases there are actually for settlements. Whether it's the Qikiqtani Truth Commission or the sixties scoop or the McLean day school, these are actually settlements that the government has paid out and will pay out. What I described before—spending 20 years to get \$30 million into debt and not getting a final agreement—was pretty frustrating and it was not very attractive to nations to participate.

Now with the B.C. policy in particular, which has eliminated, "cede, surrender, and extinguishment" and these things being done through loans, we now have over half of the first nations at a table. Some of them just want to discuss child and family services. For some it's education, and for coastal first nations it's the fishery. We are getting more and more people to the table to be able to assert their jurisdiction and work on how they want to implement their section 35 rights. That includes the Inuit land claim groups that are working towards real self-determination and some of the Métis groups, and over 400 first nations.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Thank you, Minister.

I'm just looking at your departmental plan now, if I could switch quickly to that. It shows that your ministry has met 18 of its 48 goals. Some of these missed targets have been rolled over into future years.

Is there a specific plan to address some of these goals that keep getting rolled over into future years, rather than kind of aspiring to reach them eventually?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Absolutely. One of our goals is to have more indigenous employment in the department. We know that in the split of the department a lot of the indigenous public servants were on the services side. We want more indigenous participation on the relationship side. I think there are issues.

We're at 99%, I think, in Indian residential school settlements. We want to get that done and wound down. What's exciting about this year is that we actually have been able to achieve some of the difficult things like sixties scoop and McLean day schools settlements as well as the Qikiqtani Truth Commission. Those were the priorities of our partners, and we've been able to get those things done.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Ministers, for your presence here today. Moreover, thank you for your long-standing mutual commitments to an authentic consultative process and a co-development strategy.

My questions will focus primarily on Nutrition North Canada. I was happy to see there is \$8 million going directly to the harvesters support grant program. That's something they identified. When I referred to that consultative co-development process, that's what I meant.

There was a question that arose about the impacts of not just physical health but also mental health with respect to the opportunity to harvest food traditionally, the experience that goes with that and regaining some of the lost social knowledge and the opportunities for social cohesion.

Can you provide some insight, Minister Vandal, on precisely what those monies will go to? If possible, leave a little time for a follow-up question.

Thank you.

Hon. Dan Vandal: Sure, absolutely. We have been hearing directly from northerners and people living in the Arctic for a long time that food insecurity is a huge issue in the north. Nutrition North Canada has attempted to be part of the solution to the food insecurity issue. We have to acknowledge, first of all, that food insecurity is a huge issue, much larger than one program.

What is impressive about the harvesters program was that it was co-developed with Inuit rights-holders because it was clear that the rising cost of hunting and harvesting in isolated communities was a real issue, as was the rising cost of everything in the north. It is a program that offers a subsidy to northerners and Inuit for hunting, harvesting, and fishing so that more traditional foods are accessible to their families. It's something that was co-developed.

This week I had the opportunity to meet the chairperson of the Nutrition North Advisory Board, Nellie Cournoyea. She gave me quite a history about Nutrition North Canada, the challenges and the opportunities. I think that's one of the really positive aspects that came out of co-development. I think the era of solutions for the north coming from the south are over. We want solutions by and for the north.

There's \$8 million in the supplementary estimates for Nutrition North. I believe there's close to a \$100 million in the main estimates for Nutrition North. In there, there's the harvesters program, and people are eagerly awaiting its rollout.

Mr. Adam van Koevorden: Can you elaborate a little on the partnership opportunities with other organizations? I'm thinking about organizations like the Canadian Rangers, the indigenous guardians pilot program and other indigenous-led organizations that teach some of those skills.

If you can, please be a little more specific on what the subsidies will cover and how they will impact the greater nutrition north program.

Hon. Dan Vandal: For sure.

I think there's flexibility built into the program.

In fact, I just concluded a meeting with the premier of the Northwest Territories, Caroline Cochrane, who is in town. We talked about nutrition north, and she asked how flexible the program is because they would like to put breakfast programs in schools. They would like to talk about community freezers. There's that sort of flexibility built into the program. As I said, it's co-developed with Inuit rights holders. So they're at the table. If there are opportunities for more partnership and more synergy, we are 100% for that.

As to how the money will be administered, perhaps Diane could speak on that a little bit.

• (1230)

Ms. Diane Lafleur (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs): Sure. I'd be happy to.

Part of the co-development process was actually not just the design of the program but also the funding allocation, recognizing that we are not best placed to determine where the money should be allocated. For example, in Nunavut, the funding will be administered by NTI because they have the connections to the harvesters

groups, the hunters associations and things like that. They know who is best placed to actually do the harvesting and gathering, and they know what their needs are. We haven't been specific about what exactly the money will be spent on. We're leaving it to the organizations on the ground, who have a much better understanding of what the specific need is. That's why we're confident the program is going to actually meet those needs.

There is also funding that has been allocated to CanNor that will be to be undertaking some pilot projects going forward looking at solutions for food security beyond just the harvesters support grant—things like community freezers, breakfast programs, harvesting and growing things locally, and things like that. That's part of the solution, too.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

That's your time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bérubé, you have six minutes.

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

Minister, I would like to hear your thoughts on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, but also on land claims.

Your government has committed to introduce a new bill to implement that declaration. Don't you think that, by letting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples languish, your government risks creating conditions for similar crises to arise?

In the same vein, don't you think that the crisis that just occurred forces us to review our approach toward indigenous peoples' land rights?

[*English*]

The Chair: Minister, it's not on the supplementals, but I'll give you a chance to reply.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: That's great.

I think that the commitment taken toward our platform to introduce co-developed legislation to implement the declaration is a real solution.

The declaration will provide communities and industry with certainty. When it's a yes, it's a yes, and when it's a no, it's a no. As soon as an idea for a project arises, first nations, Inuit and Métis people must be consulted. Then they have the option to approve it or not, and they can talk about their concerns.

The industry, governments, as well as first nations, Inuit and Métis must find solutions together.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Minister, the Bloc Québécois would be prepared to accelerate things if your government was to introduce a bill for implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I am sure that my colleagues from the third opposition party would also be prepared to do so.

It is important for first nations. Why must we always wait? The longer we wait, the more likely it becomes that the bill will die on the Order Paper. What are we waiting for? What is the government waiting for to move forward, Minister?

• (1235)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: We are really sorry that the declaration did not receive the Senate's support in the last Parliament.

The bill is developed in collaboration with first nations, Inuit and Métis. There is a parliamentary process to follow. According to the Liberal platform, the bill will be introduced in Parliament this year.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: One of the experts the committee invited on Tuesday, Éric Cardinal, said that the comprehensive land claims policy was an outdated policy and pointed out that it came into force in 1987. One of the things he disliked is that the Liberal government is currently both the judge and the jury when it comes to land claims.

What does your department plan to do to modernize that policy? What do you think about Mr. Cardinal's suggestion to establish a tribunal for recognizing indigenous rights, which would be similar to the Waitangi Tribunal in New Zealand, for example?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I absolutely agree that this policy is completely outdated.

I want to highlight the good work done by British Columbia's first nations and our public servants, who have successfully developed a policy for first nations through the claims process in the province.

Those words and policies previously prevented successful claims—policies such as the surrender of their rights, the violation of their inherent rights and their land rights. However, we are now changing course to obtain the support needed for discussions and for forgiving the nation's debt.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: You are talking about the nation's debt, but at the same time, for communities...

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

[*English*]

Do we need to pause? Do we have a technical issue that we need to clean up? Are we good to go?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: We're good.

The Chair: Okay, we'll carry on, then.

Mr. Johns, you have six minutes.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, ministers, for being here, especially in light of the crisis right now that we're all facing together.

Minister Bennett, I want to talk about the systemic racism that indigenous people in Canada are going through. A couple of weeks ago we were all invited, as you know—and Minister Miller was there—to hear the story of Colton Boushie and the extremely difficult circumstances his family has dealt with, including the overt racism from our justice system.

Colton's story is just one of thousands in Canada. Given the sheer amount of discrimination and the scope of what needs to be addressed, wouldn't it be appropriate to invite the UN special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples so that she can help us identify...so we can do the work, as parliamentarians, that needs to be done? You've heard me in the House on this. We need to get an answer on it.

We know Colton's family is asking for this and we just need a clear answer. Yes or no, are you going to do it?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Gord, you've raised really important points. I believe that when we met with the Boushie family—as I have done on many occasions with Minister Lametti and Minister Miller—this was really important for awareness of the racism that still exists in our justice system in all of the areas.

As we've learned through the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls inquiry, whether it's education, health or justice, racism is everywhere and the outcomes for first nations, Inuit and Métis are really unacceptable.

What we found in that conversation is that even what we are doing now for female victims in the family liaison units in all of the provinces and territories is really helping families navigate through a justice system that wasn't designed for them.

It was very interesting to realize that, of course, if the victim is a male there aren't those kinds of support and services, so we became very open to having a look at how can we provide that kind of support for those families.

• (1240)

Mr. Gord Johns: I wish I had more than seven minutes because we could have a long conversation on this.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes.

Mr. Gord Johns: What's the resistance to having the UN special rapporteur come? She's unbiased. It would give us an expert opinion, an analysis and a separate lens on this issue.

I don't understand why the government's resisting.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I hear you on this, but we are also going to have to settle this coast to coast to coast and bottom up, with all of the realities. We need the solutions that will be made in Canada—

Mr. Gord Johns: We can do both.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: We're already working on that, right here.

Mr. Gord Johns: I just don't know why the government's not open to having that external lens. It shouldn't be opposed to it. I'm urging you to take up their ask.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: We'll look into it, Gord.

Mr. Gord Johns: Currently, we know that the government is fighting the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal compensation order in court. It's opposing certification of a class action lawsuit that it previously indicated it wouldn't oppose. The government is also in court with the AFN over child welfare.

When will you call off the lawyers and just get to the table and settle this?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thank you for that question, Gord. In some ways that is my job. It is to get out of court to be able to settle these things at a table.

As we learned with the sixties scoop, even though that was a case won in court, what Chief Marcia Brown really wanted was language, culture and healing—all of those things that courts can't award.

It's so we know that when we get to the table, we're able to provide those additional services and that kind of support for the victims. We hope that we will.... As you know the government is committed to making sure that all children harmed by the system will be compensated. We also want to make sure that all the other things they need to have a secure personal cultural identity will also be in place.

Mr. Gord Johns: I see these things get dragged out, first hand.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: We don't want to go to court, but some people want to take us to court.

Mr. Gord Johns: You're spending piles of money on legal fees. I'm sure the money people can tell us how much.

I did tabled a question in the Order Paper on the Nuu-chah-nulth fishing rights court case. Some \$19 million was spent just on government legal fees, never mind court costs. We're talking tens of millions of dollars that could have paid for the quota to settle it. You've spent more money fighting than it would have cost to solve this issue.

We hear that across the cabinet you have a reconciliation lens for every member of cabinet. We're not seeing that.

I've explained to you that the number one issue for coastal people in B.C. is salmon. We're not getting restoration dollars. The court case is ongoing. The government continues to fight indigenous people for the rights that are enshrined and protected under the constitution.

Why is your department and your leadership—we're looking to both of you—not leading and talking to those interdepartmental

cabinet ministers and getting these things done? We're wasting money.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Gord Johns: I've talked to you about the Kus-kus-sum project.

Reconciliation is dying here on the ground.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I agree with you. I think my colleague will talk a little bit about the north and the DFO, but we agree. This has to be a whole of government solution.

Our deputy now chairs a deputy minister's oversight committee on treaty implementation, where all the deputy ministers come to the table. We're making some progress there, but there's no question, Gord, that fish is probably my toughest—

Mr. Gord Johns: We need your help.

The Chair: Thanks.

I've given a lot of leeway on this. We're here about the estimates. We're going to be voting on those estimates in a short while. If you have any more questions about the estimates, that would be appreciated.

Mr. Zimmer, you are next on a five-minute round.

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

I will ask questions about that.

I think the pressing issue right now is the coronavirus. Even members of Parliament are self-containing, trying to keep the spread to a minimum. That said, we've already asked the previous minister questions about those very issues, so we'll move on to the estimates.

I was up in Yukon a few weeks ago. I have before me an announcement from 2017, where the "Prime Minister...announced that the Government of Canada is committed to contributing up to \$247,381,000 to the Yukon Resource Gateway Project."

Minister Vandal, it's troubling that what we heard when we were up there talking to members of the government in Yukon was that only \$277,000 of a potential \$360-million project has been spent in the last three years.

Can you explain why?

• (1245)

Hon. Dan Vandal: And the original name of the project was what?

Mr. Bob Zimmer: It is the resource gateway project, specifically.

Hon. Dan Vandal: The resource gateway project.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I understand, Minister, that you got the job, I think, a few weeks before I got this job, so it's a big file, a big area, to get caught up with.

I wouldn't mind having a briefing, if you could find out why. I think even the residents in Yukon are wondering that same thing.

Numbers sound great when they're announced, and there's an expectation that it will get delivered on the ground, as you would know and expect in your riding.

Hon. Dan Vandal: Of course.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: The people of Yukon are expecting that project to be delivered.

I'll move on to my next question.

I asked a question in the House of Commons, Minister, about the devolution in Nunavut. We saw the comment a few weeks ago by Premier Savikataaq. I want to read his quote; it really says it all. It reads:

The creation of any new conservation and protected areas in Nunavut would have a significant impact on our ability to manage our lands and resources, and carry out negotiations for decision-making, leading to potentially very serious consequences.

That was on February 20, so it's fairly recent.

The reason this matters so much to the premier, and I can relate to that, being from northern B.C., is that we had a recent announcement of a caribou closure that's dramatically affecting our region. The rationale was that if we were to close an area to industrial development and maybe other things such as skidooing, ATVs and those sorts of things, that would somehow increase the population of caribou. It sounds like a great idea. I think two million acres have been closed.

But we saw and heard from experts that it wasn't necessary. They're saying that in certain areas, such as Tumbler Ridge, the caribou populations have been increasing, without any closures to change that. We also saw that industrial development isn't even there in two areas in British Columbia. Tweedsmuir Provincial Park is an example—no industrial development, but no caribou.

I understand the premier's concerns that closures don't necessarily do anything, whether it's closures of marine areas or interior land areas. I think what the premier and I are concerned about is the ever-increasing number. Right now I think the total closures amount to 12%. Your government and your Prime Minister have said that you want to move to 30% closures across the country by 2030. That's in 10 years. They want to more than double the protected areas. Guess where those areas come from? They aren't in Toronto or Vancouver; they're in my backyard. We produce natural resource development jobs. Indigenous jobs and prosperity come from all of that.

I want to give you time to answer the question.

The Chair: You have only 50 seconds left.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: The premier wants devolution to occur first. What is your response?

Hon. Dan Vandal: I've been to Nunavut twice in the last month. I've met with the premier on a couple of occasions. We've had good

conversations about devolution. I've met with the leaders of Inuit rights holders, NTI, a stakeholder in devolution.

We agree that devolution needs to occur. The heart and soul of devolution is giving more control over land and waters to the people who live in the territory. I think it's important to get to devolution quickly so they can have control over the protected areas.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Could we get a commitment on no more protected areas until devolution occurs? That's what the premier is asking for.

Hon. Dan Vandal: It's something that came up in discussions with the premier. It's an ongoing discussion between our governments as well as the Inuit rights holders.

The Chair: We're at time. Thank you.

Ms. Zann, you have five minutes.

• (1250)

Ms. Lenore Zann: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We have often heard that the effects of climate change in the north are felt at a rate that's three times that of the rest of Canada. This is really concerning for any of us who are paying attention to climate change, including in Nova Scotia. We often mention this. Obviously, this has a huge effect on infrastructure but also on the traditional ways of life for many northerners.

I understand that Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada has programming to fund climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies in the north. First of all, can you explain to us why scientists are saying it's happening three times faster in the north? Can you also detail some of these programs?

Hon. Dan Vandal: Thank you for that very important question. You're right on that the north is warming at three times the rate of the south. It's something that's very concerning. In my new role as northern affairs minister, I have been to the Yukon, I have been to the Northwest Territories, and I have been to Nunavut twice since Christmas. You could see the evidence on the ground. I took a ride from Yellowknife to Behchoko. The highway had lots of bumps on it, I believe because of permafrost melting. Permafrost melting is an incredibly important issue that's affecting all buildings, residential and commercial. It's affecting mining. The shoreline is eroding.

We have to do a better job of making sure we address these issues. That's why I'm very proud to say that there is over \$32 million in the main estimates to support community and regional clean energy projects that reduce reliance on diesel for electricity and for heating. We have adaptation projects in northern and indigenous communities, such as risk and vulnerability assessments, adaptation planning and community-based climate monitoring initiatives. This money will also support the meaningful engagement of indigenous peoples on climate policy, through national indigenous organizations as well as regional organizations, to monitor changes in climate and to plan and implement adaptation measures, which are incredibly important for the people who live there.

We are investing \$4 million in funding through the northern REACHE program for indigenous and northern communities to plan and construct renewable energy and energy efficiency projects, as well as to support capacity building. The program supports northern communities, governments and organizations to reduce diesel fuel use for community heating and electricity. We will also provide close to \$10 million for the climate change preparedness in the north program to support territorial governments and northern communities to plan for and implement adaptation measures to prepare for a climate that's changing.

We're providing, through these estimates this morning, \$9 million in funding for the first nations adaptation program on the impacts of climate change, including flooding. We are providing to indigenous communities \$6 million for the indigenous community-based climate monitoring program. The program supports indigenous peoples in monitoring climate impacts in their communities and on their traditional lands. As well, we are providing \$5 million in funding through the engaging indigenous peoples in climate policy program to help them at bilateral distinctions-based, senior-level tables with the Crown.

You're right that this is the defining issue of our time. It is really the underlying issue of everything that's occurring in the north. We are addressing it, but we need to continue the work we're doing.

Ms. Lenore Zann: Thank you.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Perhaps I can jump in here. Twenty years ago, when I was a new member of Parliament and a member of the Arctic caucus, we were in Tuktoyaktuk. We went into the community freezer, which they dig into the permafrost, where you go down a little ladder. There was water trickling down the wall of the freezer. It was trickling down the permafrost. So the science is one thing, but you can see it before your very eyes. That's what the elders have been telling us with their indigenous knowledge.

I was very pleased to know, when we were at the opening of the highway from Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk, that sensors were being put down into that whole highway—by the University of Manitoba, I believe—so that they can actually measure in real time what's happening to that permafrost.

● (1255)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have a five-minute question round with Mr. Vidal.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Mr. Schmale is taking my time.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Thank you.

Sorry to keep bouncing around on you, Chair. We'll keep you on your toes. It's fun.

Minister Bennett, I want to pick up where we left off last time, if we could, in terms of the departmental plan and the goals that were set and not met, that type of thing. In your departmental plan, there were eight goals that didn't specify targets or target dates. I can go over them if you want, but I'm sure you know what I'm talking about, the eight. Is there a reason why there were no targets set or unspecified dates to achieve those targets?

I can list some, if you want.

Hon. Dan Vandal: Yes, why don't you list them?

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Okay, one is “Percentage of First Nations that exercise options to collect, manage and/or access revenues held in trust”. Another is the “Number of litigation claims concluded”. Others are “First Nations communities undertaking solid waste management improvement projects”, “Percentage of first nations communities where non-government revenues represent 25% or more of total revenues” and “Number of indigenous businesses created and/or expanded”, there is no target or target date. There are a few more, but I have little time.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: In the what, by when and how, I think the deputy does that.

So why don't you just take it, Deputy?

Mr. Daniel Watson: I'm very happy to. Thank you for the question.

I'm happy to provide a fuller debrief on this afterwards, if that's useful to the committee. On a number of the different targets that we set, the realities will be very different for different communities, but they'll also be very much of an ongoing nature. You talk about waste management and things like that. These are issues that we will have to deal with for a very long period of time, so in some instances, we do not have a single date because we don't expect everybody to be at exactly the same position at the same time, and we have to work with the communities to figure out exactly what it is they want to achieve by a different point in time.

I can come back with a fuller briefing on exactly why we've set—

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I'm also just curious. We're three years into it and there's still no target. I'm just curious what the roadblocks are here.

Mr. Daniel Watson: Again, it will vary target by target, but sometimes it's just the ongoing nature of the work itself, and so sometimes you don't have a situation where you arrive at a finite point. Concluding an agreement is a finite point; it's binary—you've either met it or you haven't. Other things that you work on would be of an ongoing nature, so it's harder to set exactly what the target might be there.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I appreciate that.

If you are laying this out in your departmental plan—I agree that what you're saying is true—why bother putting it in if you're not going to measure it or have any...? Is it just kind of...? I don't even know how to explain it, but I'm looking for clarification, if I could.

Mr. Daniel Watson: Again, I'm happy to do a more full and detailed briefing on these specific pieces, if that's useful.

In some of the incidences, we know that these things are important to do. We know they're important to tackle and to take on, but the nature of the activity itself and the time frame in which you do it makes it much harder than with some more binary things. We don't want to lose the value and the importance of undertaking the activity—we want to make sure that's underlined—but figuring out exactly when you would say that you were done is a much harder thing to agree upon. It's more important to understand that they're actually being undertaken and accomplished.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Okay, I have one minute. Sorry, I might have to jump in here. I do have one more question that I want to get in if I could.

In 2018-19, the government spent \$15.7 billion and had 113 indicators for the Department of Indigenous Services and the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations, but I think this goes to your answer. Of those indicators, 31 or 27% were met; 20 were not met, 17.7%; in 52 the result was to be achieved, so in other words, not met, and were pretty vague for a bunch of reasons, as you mentioned. The main estimates now say we've spent \$19.2 billion this year. Better is always possible, so better than 27% success rate this time—

• (1300)

The Chair: You have five seconds.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Are we hopeful? Are we looking to the stars?

Mr. Daniel Watson: We're very hopeful. We continue on with the work. We continue to advance—

Mr. Jamie Schmale: That's a lot of money for 27%.

Mr. Daniel Watson: Well, it's an item that is continuing on for a longer period of time, too. If we're still sitting at 27% at the end date we've set for these things, that would be a big problem, of course, but we intend very much not to be at that point when we get to the ending.

The Chair: Our time is up on that round.

We'll conclude with Mr. Powlowski for five minutes, please, and then we have to get to voting on the estimates.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Well, appropriately, as I'm eating my plate of vegetables here, which would cost \$50 in a northern community, I want to ask Mr. Vandal about the nutrition north program.

Maybe this is a bit of an observation, but maybe you can comment on this. I know this because I went to a food bank presentation in Thunder Bay. The food bank in Thunder Bay sends a lot of donated food to northern fly-in communities. The presenters had slides there showing the prices of food in the northern stores in those fly-in communities. They showed the price and then the price with the nutrition north subsidy, and the differences were really trivial. A little pod of strawberries was \$9 without the subsidy, and it was \$8.50. They had repeated examples like that.

In one of our earlier committee meetings, I mentioned this. I'm not sure if it was Mr. Watson or someone else who replied to this that they had been to Nunavut and in Nunavut the prices of milk, cheese and things were fairly similar to downtown Toronto prices. They said that the amount of the subsidy is proportional to the distance from the built-up areas.

It seems that this results in a real inequality. People in fly-in communities such as Attawapiskat, Pikangikum and Sandy Lake had very little subsidy, and nutritious food basically was unaffordable, whereas for people in the really far north communities it was much more affordable.

Maybe it's just a comment to look into. I can ask a question after this.

Hon. Dan Vandal: No, I could try to address that. I mean, everything is incredibly expensive in the north because there are no roads. That's what it comes down to. I can understand that if you're going to the far Arctic to provide food it would be more expensive to get it there than to a location that's closer. That's just a very preliminary analysis.

I do know, based on reviews that have been done through the nutrition north advisory council, that at the end of the week a basket of food in the north has been reduced.... I won't say significantly, because it's still too expensive, but it has been reduced.

That's why we're putting more money into the subsidy end. That's why we're trying to find other programs like the harvesters program. We're working with rights holders and people who live in the north on trying to be more creative. It's an important issue. It's such a fundamentally important issue that we need to do better.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Okay. My other question was given to me. Usually with questions that are given to me I throw them away and make up my own questions, but I like this question. It relates to British Columbia. I have three kids in British Columbia. Two of them vote for Gord Johns' party and one of them votes for Bob Zimmer—

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Hear, hear!

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: —so I don't know where I went wrong as a father, but I thought this was a good question.

In September 2019, British Columbian representatives and participating indigenous nations in British Columbia co-developed the British Columbia specific recognition and reconciliation policy, also known as the B.C. policy. I have heard that this new policy has removed most if not all of the obstacles that prevented first nations in B.C. to fully participate in the B.C. treaty process. Can you explain what obstacles this new policy is removing?

I really am wondering what policies those were.

● (1305)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thank you for question.

Again, it follows up on Madame Bérubé's question.

The comprehensive claims policy was really getting in the way. It was based on loans. People had to sign away their rights: cede and surrender, extinguishment of rights. In this new B.C. policy, which I'm happy to table with the committee, you will see that all of those impediments have been removed to the satisfaction of the B.C. first nations in the treaty process, but also to the Government of British Columbia and the Government of Canada.

We believe this really will allow people who stalled in the treaty process, who didn't want to have to pay back \$20 million in loans.... By forgiving those loans, by paying back.... And particularly, Bob was talking about Yukon. Up there, most of those nations had paid back their loans and were paying back the money to those communities. They now have that money to use on their priorities. I think this has been a huge success. I think it really is what other nations are now looking at, together with what the already self-governing nations have done in a collaborative fiscal policy, which really gives them the money outside of the Indian Act to run their governments and basically get maybe three times more than the money they would have got under the Indian Act.

It means this has helped with the negotiation, but the incentive of why to do the hard work to get to self-governing is actually worth the hard work these nations are doing to get there.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We're at the time right there, and we're over time on our meeting, but I thought it was a very good, productive meeting.

We have some things to do, including the matter of the vice-chair.

Did you want to...?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Are we in committee business now?

The Chair: No, we're not. We have to vote on the main estimates.

DEPARTMENT OF INDIGENOUS SERVICES

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$1,949,217,820

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$6,832,498

Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....\$10,741,544,381

(Votes 1, 5 and 10 agreed to)

CANADIAN HIGH ARCTIC RESEARCH STATION

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$29,453,623

(Vote 1 agreed to)

DEPARTMENT OF CROWN-INDIGENOUS RELATIONS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$1,528,290,836

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$268,287

Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....\$3,309,017,994

Vote L15—Loans to Indigenous claimants.....\$25,903,000

(Votes 1, 5, 10 and L15 agreed to)

The Chair: The votes are all carried.

Shall I report the votes to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, we have some—

Yes, Mr. Anandasangaree.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Chair, I would like to nominate Ms. Bérubé for vice-chair of the committee.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Bérubé, do you accept your nomination as second vice-chair?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Yes.

[*English*]

The Chair: It is moved by Mr Anandasangaree that Madam Bérubé be elected as second vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

Does that motion carry?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you.

Welcome, Madame Bérubé.

We are going to suspend the open meeting now and move in camera for committee business. We'll ask anyone who is not needed here to leave so that we can carry on with our committee business.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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