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# Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

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Chair: Mr. Bob Bratina





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• (1405)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.)):** As the chair of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, I call this meeting to order. I'd like to welcome all to meeting number seven.

I'd like to start by acknowledging that I am joining you today from the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinabe and Chonnonton nations.

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

In order to facilitate the work of our interpreters and ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow. Interpretation in this video conference will work very much like in a regular committee meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French.

In order to resolve the sound issues raised in recent virtual committee meetings and to ensure clear audio transmissions, we ask those who wish to speak during meetings to set your interpretation language as follows. If you are speaking in English, please ensure that you are on the English channel. If you are speaking in French, please ensure that you are on the French channel, accessed by the globe in the centre bottom, which says "interpretation". As you are speaking, if you plan to alternate from one language to the other, you will also need to switch the interpretation channel so that it aligns with the language you are speaking. You may want to allow for a short pause when switching languages.

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

I remind you that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair.

Should members need to request the floor outside of their designated time for questions, they should activate their microphone and state that they have a point of order. If a member wishes to intervene on a point of order that has been raised by another member,

they should use the "raise hand" function. This will signal to the chair your interest to speak. In order to do so, you should click on "participants" at the bottom of the screen. When the list pops up, you will see that you can click on "raise hand" next to your name.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When not speaking, your microphone should be on mute. The use of headsets is strongly encouraged.

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

Before we get started, can everyone click on their screen in the top right-hand corner and ensure that they are on gallery view? With this view you should be able to see all of the participants in a grid view. It will ensure that all video participants can see each other.

During this meeting, we will follow the same rules that usually apply to opening statements and rounds of questioning of witnesses during our regular meetings. Each witness will have up to 10 minutes for an opening statement, followed by the usual rounds of questions from members.

Now I'd like to welcome our witnesses. From the Assembly of First Nations, we have National Chief Perry Bellegarde; from the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Natan Obed, the president; and from the Métis National Council, David Chartrand, vice-president and national spokesperson.

Chief Bellegarde, we are now ready to hear your opening statement for up to 10 minutes. Welcome.

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde (Assembly of First Nations):** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the committee members and, as well, to all the people listening and managing to be safe by doing this call through Zoom. It's an amazing thing.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a crisis for all of Canada as it is for the whole world. I wanted to acknowledge the work of all parties to co-operate and respond in a timely and effective way to deal with this issue. It's an extremely challenging time for everyone. The situation on the ground changes daily, and we're all still learning about how the spread of this disease is best contained.

This makes the context for policy development and funding decisions difficult at best, so we should all acknowledge that these are, indeed, challenging times. We also need to acknowledge the unique challenges facing first nations peoples, challenges that both create needs and all too often impair the ability of first nations governments to ensure the safety of their people. This pandemic presents the opportunity to build back better in all sectors, but we must be cautious that we don't move too fast, too quickly, and we also don't reopen economies too prematurely.

As of May 7, there were 164 confirmed cases on first nations reserves and another 17 in the territories. While the virus has been slower to reach first nations, the number of cases is rising daily. For reasons that I will get into in a minute, there is a reasonable concern that COVID-19 will have a disproportionately negative effect on first nations, as did the H1N1 virus in 2009.

I fear there are already far more cases among our people than we currently know. Unfortunately, largely due to gaps in coordination and information sharing with the federal government and the provinces and territories, first nations do not have access to reliable sources of information that track infections among first nations. This is just one way that COVID-19 affects first nations differently. Canada must take clear action in response to these distinct needs.

To inform this committee's study of the government's response from a first nations' perspective, the pandemic must be understood in the context of the socio-economic gap between first nations citizens and other Canadians. It's a gap I always talk about in terms of quality of life.

A recent analysis by Indigenous Services Canada, using 2016 census data and the United Nations human development index as a measure, reveals that Canada sits 12th in the world in terms of quality of life, but when you apply the same indices to our people, we measure 78th. It's 12 versus 78, and that's the gap that needs to be addressed.

The intensified risk is created by significantly higher rates of already compromised health among first nations and the unfortunate fact that so many first nations do not have adequate access to health care in their communities, or even close to their communities. These factors must be addressed on an emergency basis during this crisis but more fundamentally during the recovery period.

To understand first nations' vulnerability to this virus, we need to look at not just government delivery and funding of health care but also other services that impact community health. For example, due to overcrowded housing at seven times the rate of the rest of Canada, this virus will spread more quickly. The lack of clean water in so many first nations means that basic precautions like hand-washing are more difficult to follow. There are 96 remote or fly-in first nations across Canada, so a shortage of reliable transportation means that people will have additional problems accessing care.

There are serious food security issues in many first nations, especially in the north, and the upcoming fire and flood seasons exacerbate an already difficult situation in these communities.

• (1410)

We also need to acknowledge the specific challenges faced by first nations governments in exercising their jurisdiction to respond to this crisis and plan for a recovery. For example, there's poverty among our people. We are the poorest people in the country when compared to other Canadians. Our businesses do not have the same access to financing or supports, and our governments don't have the same human and financial resources to respond fully.

The jurisdictions of first nations governments are not recognized or supported adequately, leading to a lack of coordination and gaps in the delivery of services. This is a good example to show more clearly why there's a need to make policing an essential service. Right now it's not an essential service in Canada, and that's something that should be recommended and implemented as soon as possible.

Canada's response must take all these unique factors into account. The fundamental principles of an effective government response to this crisis are the following: First nations must be included in all discussions relating to COVID-19; jurisdictional conflict, confusion and resistance to first nations' exercising our inherent jurisdictions must not stand in the way of ensuring that first nations citizens are protected; and first nations must be supported in exercising their authority and jurisdiction in meeting the health needs of their communities and in planning for recovery.

Last Friday, Minister Miller detailed for this committee the \$740 million that Canada has made available for first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples to respond to this crisis. We appreciate that these funds are scalable and based on need, but we need to see this funding greatly expanded, as the needs are many. Remember the 12 versus 78 gap.

Even with the indigenous fund, it provides welcome help to 6,000 of our businesses. There are actually 40,000 first nations businesses across Canada, so the funding commitments will leave many without help. This committee should also be aware that many of our businesses and citizens may not be able to access broader programs set up in response to this crisis due to unique circumstances that apply on reserve. Canada assures us that some of these details are still being worked out, but they're being considered without serious input from first nations and are being announced without any prior notification.

We have three requests, Mr. Chair.

First, first nations must have a seat at the table in designing any response that impacts us. Canada must engage first nations directly to properly address the circumstances that we face and to respect first nations jurisdiction. That includes a seat at any table addressing the current health crisis. Even in the future, when you start looking at reopening the economy, we must be at those tables.

This must also be the case with provincial governments. There are several situations where provincial governments' unilateral decisions have a direct negative impact on first nations. In northern Saskatchewan, for example, in La Loche, there are over a hundred-and-some cases, and they are expanding quickly. Certain officials there prevented citizens from travelling to grocery stores to get food. We all know that's not proper or right.

In northern Ontario, some municipalities are saying there's too much need through COVID-19, that communities are not going to be able to accept first nations people when they come out of the north for evacuations like in Saskatchewan. Thunder Bay has said that. Where do these people go? There have to be options.

Several provinces are refusing to respect lawful decisions by first nations governments' restricting traffic flow and gatherings, among other safety measures. There's a lack of respect when first nations say, "This is our jurisdiction, and we're saying you can't come in or out". There are problems with people enforcing those laws as well.

A big historical issue is that provinces have regarded first nations as a federal responsibility, and provinces prioritize the needs of the citizens they represent. However, no first nations person, wherever they reside, should go without the supports needed to get through this crisis. These are unacceptable situations that put lives at risk, and they result from a refusal by provinces to respect first nations jurisdiction.

• (1415)

My second recommendation is that Canada must bring the premiers together with first nations leadership on an emergency basis to resolve these jurisdictional issues. Just as Jordan's principle made it clear that no first nations child should go without services, provide the services up front and work out who's responsible later on. It's the same principle going forward.

My third and final recommendation for this committee and for the ongoing study is that Canada's commitment to first nations self-determination must be matched by immediate and sustainable long-term support for first nations governance capacity. We cannot adequately protect citizens when funding for first nations governance is one-quarter of what other governments spend.

With those three recommendations, we can lay the foundation to avoid the challenges that future crises might bring, and support economic and social recovery from the current crisis. Just as the recession of 2009 disproportionately affected first nations' earnings, the socio-economic gap between first nations and other Canadians means that first nations will suffer more due to this pandemic.

• (1420)

**The Chair:** You're almost out of time.

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** Just as the historic failure to recognize first nations inherent and treaty rights, title and jurisdic-

tion has resulted in an incomprehensible mess of competing authorities, the COVID-19 crisis shines a light on the real-life consequences to first nations citizens. Just as any government requires the fiscal capacity to exercise its jurisdiction efficiently and effectively, this crisis makes it even clearer that the time to act on the chronic underfunding of first nations governments is long overdue. These are the next steps needed.

The last point is on the throne speech—

**The Chair:** Chief, we're out of time now, and in respect of our—

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** Don't forget the throne speech and the UN declaration.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Chief. We'll have opportunities during the rounds of questioning for you to expand on some of the issues, but we need to get through our presentations and then to our questioners.

Thank you for your presentation.

Next up is President Obed.

Please go ahead, sir, for 10 minutes.

**Mr. Natan Obed (President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to be presenting here today to the committee, and it's good to see so many familiar faces.

As I've been introduced, I am Natan Obed, the president of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. I'm here to talk about the status of COVID-19 across Inuit Nunangat and for Inuit generally. Right now, our status sits in stark contrast to most of the rest of the country, which can be largely attributed to the public health responses that were implemented immediately and, of course, the remoteness of our 51 communities. To date, there have been only 17 confirmed cases of COVID-19 detected within Inuit Nunangat, and that is across four jurisdictions and 51 communities. Of those 17 cases, all individuals have now recovered.

We've been successful so far in protecting our communities from COVID-19, despite substantial long-term gaps between Inuit and other Canadians on key health measures, which have created unique and considerable vulnerability to both infection with SARS-CoV-2 and to the development of severe COVID-19 cases. The success to date is a testament to the efficacy of the governance structures that are in place across Inuit Nunangat and also the relationships that we now have with the federal government, with the provinces and territories and also within the self-determination of Inuit leadership, from Nunatsiavut, Nunavik, Nunavut and the Inuvialuit region. It shows what can be achieved when Inuit self-determination and strong partnerships with governments work together for a common concern and a common goal.

Prior to COVID-19, we have generally experienced greater adverse socio-economic conditions compared with non-indigenous Canadians. This is seen in statistics such as our average life expectancy, which is about 10.5 years less than that of all other Canadians. Also, our families live in more crowded homes and are less food secure. Our overcrowding rate is at about 52% as of 2020.

Our access to health care is also highly constrained. Most of our health systems are conducted in our communities through health centres that are staffed by nurses, and our regions are basically referral structures to southern care for major illnesses within hospital. We also suffer tuberculosis at a rate of 300 times the non-indigenous Canadian rate. Our respiratory illnesses, above and beyond tuberculosis, are similar in many ways to COVID-19 and continue to plague our communities, despite our ongoing efforts to see not only tuberculosis but RSV and other respiratory illnesses eradicated in our communities.

The current physical distancing measures, travel restrictions and reduced services have seriously impacted Inuit incomes, communities and businesses. The current air transportation circumstances are unsustainable. The annual resupply, including the sealift shipments during the four-to-five-month ice-free season, is definitely going to be impacted. Even though we have assurances from all parties involved, as of today, that the season is going ahead, we know it is not going to be a normal season. We rely very heavily on ports like Montreal, and also on Churchill, Manitoba, to provide staging areas so that we can have all the non-perishable items in our communities resupplied in any given year. The ability of individuals and businesses to place orders has already been impacted, and warehouses in the south, which would typically start to fill up by now, are sitting nearly empty. This will have a direct impact on businesses and households in this and future years.

I want to touch on three key priority areas. The first is in relation to increased public health measures to prevent the circulation of COVID-19 in our communities, specifically in relation to testing and adequate water and sewage. Improving access to testing and reducing delays in test results remain key concerns across our regions, specifically when it comes to reopening our economy and having trust in our transportation networks, and also in our response within our small, isolated communities.

- (1425)

The Cepheid GeneXpert testing platform is a U.S.-based testing platform. We have used it historically to test for TB in a much quicker way than sending sputum samples south, but it is now being used to test for COVID-19. There are a few of these machines in our communities, but we need more access to the testing cartridges and wider access to the test machines themselves if there continue to be setbacks with the Spartan Bioscience cube. We are very thankful that the Government of Canada has put Inuit, northern and rural communities at the front of the queue, when it comes to these point-of-care tests.

Also, in relation to adequate water and sewer services, one of the big public health measures is washing hands frequently, but in some of our communities there is a lack of access to water and sewer services in real time. Infrastructure investments and a commit-

ment to ongoing funding is therefore needed to support water and sewers in the longer term.

The second priority is maintaining capacity for the COVID-19 response. We're transitioning now into extended public health measures and travel restrictions. We also know that to have effective and sustainable Inuit-centred social protection initiatives, we need to ensure that individuals and families don't fall through the cracks. This means that additional investments to support community-led initiatives for reducing residential crowding and increasing access to and support for shelters and transitional housing, as outlined in our Inuit Nunangat housing strategy, are very important. Also, expanding access to mental health and addictions services, as outlined in our national Inuit suicide prevention strategy is very important at this time as well.

We need to continue toward strong health systems. This includes strengthening health human resourcing, laboratory services, infection control and virtual care in response to COVID-19. Proactive measures should be taken by the federal government to identify and minimize impacts on Inuit from predicted shortages in essential medical supplies, personal protective equipment, and drugs and vaccines, including those required for TB and other preventable communicable diseases.

All of our interventions must be evidence-based, globally informed and Inuit-specific. We also want timely access to Inuit-specific data. This will be critical for informing the responses by both the public government and our Inuit organizations, and for understanding the impact of the COVID-19 disease and the pandemic on Inuit living both within and outside Inuit Nunangat.

As of May 6, detailed case information was only available for 53% of reported COVID-19 cases in Canada. Data sharing across jurisdictions has long been a challenge for Inuit, and if we value evidence-based decision-making, now is the time to have more specific data that we can use for our population. The federal government should require provincial and territorial compliance with detailed case reporting on COVID-19, including identifying whether an individual with COVID-19 is first nations, Inuit or Métis.

Our final priority is financial assistance for immediate economic needs. This is a major consideration. We need an Inuit Nunangat approach across the federal government to funding programs aimed at providing immediate and near-term COVID-19-related financial assistance. This means that a lens that has sometimes been applied in the past for a northern fund or an Atlantic Canada fund or a Quebec fund should not be used with us. Our regions get caught up in the messiness of the federal administration's different administrative structures. We are a homogeneous population and require a very specific response.

We have developed a strategic options paper that we have presented to the committee today. In it there are some key points, such as direct Inuit-specific support for businesses; a commitment by the federal government to support major Inuit development projects; an Inuit Nunangat supplement for Inuit eligible for the Canada emergency response benefit; and a supplement to support post-secondary students and other educational supports. There are a number of other things, especially in relation to the airline industry and the immediate concern that we have about the sustainability of these essential services. I encourage you to read that.

• (1430)

A final consideration is that any successful response to COVID-19 in relation to Inuit must be evidence-based, globally informed and Inuit-specific, as I said. Our reality is very different from the rest of Canada and our best path through this pandemic is to ensure the Government of Canada's response to COVID-19 in Inuit communities is specifically developed with Inuit and for Inuit, based on the best available knowledge and the inclusivity of all Inuit communities and regions, whether they're in territories or provinces.

*Nakurmiik.*

**The Chair:** Thank you, President Obed.

Many of the language nuances are new for me, so I think I heard you correctly identify the organization as Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. Is that right?

**Mr. Natan Obed:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now, from the Métis National Council, David Chartrand is the vice-president and national spokesperson.

Mr. Chartrand, you have 10 minutes.

**Mr. David Chartrand (Vice-President and National Spokesperson, Métis National Council):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me compliment you on pronouncing ITK because I can't say it to my old friend Natan. There are so many different times that I've tried.

I want to start off quickly, before I do my presentation, with this. I'm a leader who likes to speak right off the cuff. I don't really read speeches, but I have no choice. This is a standing committee so I have to make a presentation. I want you to visualize this when you're dealing with the Métis. What you hear from Perry and Natan are the challenges that they face, and what systems and structures they have in place.

Last week you had three ministers here, plus you had FNIHB, first nations and Inuit health branch, and they said to you point blank, the Métis are under federal jurisdiction. When it comes to a province, "Sorry, you're under federal jurisdiction"—that's what happens to us.

I really want you to picture this. We have 400,000 Métis in western Canada. In Manitoba alone, I have 80 villages and all the rest are in urban centres, where my people live half and half, 50% each way. We don't have one clinic. We don't have one nursing station. We have zero—nothing. Imagine from that perspective what I'm challenged with and what we, the Métis Nation, are challenged with, with the pandemic, yet we pay billions of dollars in taxes every year both nationally and provincially. We pay over \$400 million or \$500 million in Manitoba. Just think about it for a second and picture our situation.

Let me start off again, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much for allowing me to speak here today. I'm speaking to you from the homeland of the Métis Nation of Manitoba. Of course, the study on what response we will be doing to COVID is going to be a continuing challenge for all of us. In our discussion on March 13, the Prime Minister assured me there would be distinct funding for the Métis Nation. That's fundamental. It's very important. It has to be there or we will be left in the dust and blackened out of the process.

On March 25, the federal government provided \$30 million for the Métis Nation COVID-19 emergency response plan. The \$30 million is enabling the Métis National Council's governing members or provincial affiliates to provide immediate supports to Métis Nation citizens, families and seniors. They have developed and are rolling out action plans, providing immediate supports such as food, income, supplies and rent supplements. Thousands of our elders across our homeland in western Canada have been contacted and are being assured of and have been provided with assistance while staying in their homes. In fact, in Manitoba, we did over 3,000 hampers already.

I greatly appreciate Canada's rapid response to help our citizens and families in times of crisis. At the same time, the health emergency has exposed the particular vulnerability and disadvantages of the 400,000 strong Métis Nation population. It has highlighted the distressing fact that neither level of government has taken responsibility to address the deep-seated health conditions of the Métis people in Canada. At the federal level, we are excluded from resources from the first nations and Inuit health branch, and this continues during this pandemic, even after, if you remember, in 2015, the Daniels decision came down, where it made it very clear that the federal government has fiduciary responsibility for the Métis. Still, to this day, even during this pandemic, the first nations health branch is saying, "No, you're not under our jurisdiction."

Minister Miller and Minister Bennett appeared before you last Friday and informed this committee on how much PPE was distributed to indigenous communities, the strategy, of course, and the health supplies. What they obviously did not tell you is that none of this was distributed to the Métis community. In fact, in Manitoba, we've been forced to purchase our own directly from China. We have shipments coming in as we speak, but it's a very risky venture when you're putting hundreds of thousands of dollars outside your country and hoping it's going to come back with your product. We have no choice as neither level of government has provided access to those important pandemic supplies.

I want to thank this committee for recognizing the Métis community in northern Saskatchewan, La Loche. I heard Perry Bellegarde reference La Loche. That's a Métis community with a large Métis population. They say it's Dene, but there's a large Métis population there. The neighbouring band is Clearwater River Dene Nation band. In fact, the Métis national president's son is the chief of that reserve.

Perry raised this, and it's not in my speech, but it's interesting that he raised it. When you look at La Loche, you see that the first case came on April 15 or 17. If you look at the band, you see they have 12. The Métis community has 117 cases, because there was no plan. That's just how fast it is that the one with a plan can maybe stop it, and in the one without a plan, it takes off.

• (1435)

This pandemic is reaching hundreds of people and affecting those in the communities of Buffalo Narrows, Île-à-la-Crosse and Beauval this spring. Those are all Métis villages I reference. In speaking to one of the leaders in the affected community, it is clear that there was no set plan by the province or the federal government—because both were arguing over who was responsible—to address the crisis that occurred in the Métis community because of jurisdictional debate.

At the provincial level, despite our staggering chronic illnesses, the province tells us to deal with the federal government to deal with our unique health conditions and needs. Our pandemic plans have been limited to providing income and food supports. In British Columbia, for example, this has included supports for families with children in school to access online educational supports.

In Manitoba, we've created our own isolation units to ensure that anyone who needs a safe place to stay during the pandemic can stay in these isolation units. Why have we done that? We have over-

crowding, just like Inuit and just like with the first nations. We have 10 people in a two-bedroom, so how do you isolate with 10 people in two bedrooms? We bought tiny homes, isolation units, and we created our own off the communities.

Our pandemic plan has been limited by a lack of access to Métis health care services. Despite all health research that shows how important it is to have culturally competent and safe health care, Métis have been shut out of the provincial and federal health care systems. As I mentioned, in Manitoba we created over a hundred isolation units but have been unable to secure any health care workers. We have had no partnership with a health care provider, and we actually had to search for and find a health care provider virtually from Ontario. It shows, even in this pandemic, how vulnerable we are in the health care field.

We had proposed a new approach to the Métis health care in budget 2019 and again this year for budget 2020, an approach that would see federal investments to Métis health care that would assist the Métis nation in transforming the provincial health care system to allow us to establish Métis health care hubs in each province in western Canada. Our health care proposal would also enable us to meet the non-insured health care needs of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

It is our hope that this budget proposal will be supported, and we believe that the proposed new federal legislation, indigenous health care legislation, will correct this inequity. In the meantime, we must be vigilant in ensuring that the resources to cope with the COVID crisis are available to Métis governments as the situation evolves. They are all the more important, given our lack of access to health care resources.

I want to touch on Canada's support for small business, because you referenced it last week with the three ministers. This is of particular importance to our people. We have the highest rate of self-employment of all indigenous peoples. We are grateful for the investments made by the Government of Canada to support small and mid-size businesses. Our Métis Nation capital corporations, which make loans to our entrepreneurs, have paused the loan payments at this time to support those clients during this period of business interruption. They are working with their clients to keep them afloat. We're telling our businesses that they don't have to pay their loans right now. We'll keep them afloat for six months, they don't pay, and then we'll come back.



Their clients will need additional bridge loans to make it through the shutdown. The Government of Canada is proposing to support our Métis capital corporations to meet the needs of their clients, but it is proposing to base the amount of support on the overall value of each capital corporation's loan, not the volume of loans that are out there. The reason I say that to you is so you'll capture it. It's a little complicated, and I have to get briefed over and over.

The way they're approaching this matter is that they're going by volume. If you had a million-dollar loan, then you can have a higher ratio given to you, but your only cap is at \$40,000. On the smaller loans, we have hundreds and hundreds of them that exist out there, so we're saying go by volume of loans to keep the small businesses alive, not by gross volume, because this way you're only supporting a few businesses. We're debating that with Canada right now.

This does not work for us in Manitoba, as our capital corporations have hundreds of small loans supporting smaller Métis businesses. Our entrepreneurs are very anxious, which may force them to make decisions like selling equipment and abandoning leases, which they would not otherwise do if they knew there was backstop financing available to get them through this rough period. Most also have difficulty accessing credit from conventional lenders, which is why we established the Métis capital corporations decades ago.

The proposal by the Government of Canada to base its support for our capital corporation in Manitoba does not reflect the needs of our small Métis businesses in Manitoba, and we urge the committee to support our request to change the supports to reflect the number of entrepreneurs who require support, and not use a gross mechanism.

I realize that the ministers, the members of this committee, and indeed all of us who represent Canadians at this time are facing unprecedented demands, pressures and anxieties, and I'm sure you're hearing it loud and clear from all three leaders.

I urge this committee to support our request for greater inclusion in the health care system going forward and for support for our Métis small business sector. This pandemic has shown us what systemic discrimination can do and shows the weakness in our health care system.

We look forward to working with you to transform the health care system and hope this is reflected in new indigenous health legislation in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me to speak here today.

• (1440)

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.):** May I have a point of order?

I'm not sure if it's a real point of order, but there was something, Mr. Chartrand, in your presentation that wasn't clear. You said that in La Loche there were 12 and 117. I think you were referring to the number of cases of COVID-19 in La Loche.

**Mr. David Chartrand:** Yes. The first case came into La Loche around April 15 or 17, and when it took off, it took off. However, the reserve next door.... It's connected. It's the same thing across

Manitoba with Métis villages. For those of you who do not know the Métis community in western Canada, on nearly every reserve you'll find a Métis village next door.

What happened there, of course, was that there was a pandemic plan, a first nations plan by FNIHB with all the bands in Canada. Therefore, there is a strategy. They also have some medical supplies and all the rest that comes with it.

Thank you for the question, because what happened there on the reserve was that, even though they're connected to each other, they only have 12 cases in the band, but on the Métis side, it just skyrocketed because there was no plan, no supports, no programs, no supply chain, nothing. Both levels of government were saying, "It's not my jurisdiction; it's yours." Both levels of government are still blaming each other, and it is creeping into the next villages now, because families are taking it to the next villages not realizing they're carrying it.

**The Chair:** Mr. Gary Vidal, go ahead, please. You have six minutes.

**Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all our witnesses for appearing today. Obviously, we appreciate your taking the time to be with us and sharing your wisdom. It is valued and appreciated.

My first question is for National Chief Bellegarde.

First of all, National Chief, thanks for the opportunity we had to meet last week and to get to know each other a bit better and to share some of our common background in Saskatchewan. In that meeting, we talked about data, testing and some of that type of stuff, so in follow up to that, I had the opportunity in the very first virtual Parliament to ask Mr. Miller about the reliability of the data that's being used for measuring results for indigenous people, how the decisions are being made and how resources are being allocated subject to that.

The answer I was provided is that ISC only has data for on-reserve populations. As we all know, more than half of indigenous people live off reserve. They're left relying on provinces and territories to report any of the tests and data being done by those organizations. In essence, what we have is some very inaccurate data that we're using to make decisions. The other difficulty or challenge we're hearing about in northern Saskatchewan particularly is that there's a stigma associated with testing positive, and in some of the smaller northern communities that's causing people to hesitate to get tested and to avoid that process. They are scared to come forward.

All that said, with all the widespread testing that's now going on—in fact, in La Loche, I believe they're going door to door testing people now—as we move forward, could you maybe just discuss how important it is to have accurate data in structuring the response for indigenous people?

• (1445)

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** Thanks, Gary. Yes, you need good information and you need good data to make informed decisions. We always say, before you make any type of decision, get the best information you can.

Right now, it's really difficult to track the numbers and statistics. On reserve you can kind of track, but a lot of our people live off reserve, so it's with the provincial health authorities. There has to be a better way of tracking, and then you can do your wraparound. You can provide support to that individual and that family. You can track it and self-isolate better, but you need to know who is the individual.

We get it about the legal requirements. There's confidentiality, and all those things. However, you need good data and good information. That's why we talked about voluntarily offering your status card or your status number, or declaring whether you're first nation, Métis or Inuit. That has to be looked at, because that's a major thing.

I just got off the phone this morning with Rick Laliberte. He is the guy who's in charge of that area, La Loche. They're working together. They're on the phone right now, as we speak. The mayors from La Loche, Beauval and Green Lake are working with the chiefs, and they're looking at it from the perspective of a Treaty No. 10 pandemic area. They're trying to get coordinated between the Métis people, the first nations people and the mayors so they can control it, because it has really expanded.

I'm grateful and thankful that they're working together, but this whole piece about data is that you have to have better information going forward.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Thank you for that, National Chief.

For your information, we normally are sitting in on those calls with Rick and all those leaders at this time. We will join them as soon as our committee is over and get in on those calls. We're trying to stay on top of that as well.

I have one more question for you, and then I'll move on to some of our other witnesses.

As I'm sure you're aware, there was a press release issued by the Prince Albert Grand Council yesterday on an issue relating to inland fisheries in northeast Saskatchewan. I had a fairly lengthy discussion this morning with Grand Chief Brian Hardlotte, the issue being freshwater fish supply and demand. It's not so much that they can't go out and fish. There's just no demand for their product. As I understand it, the AFN has an inland fisheries committee in place to try to address some of these kinds of challenges, but that typically focuses more on the coastal things than the inland fisheries' matters.

As an MP for northern Saskatchewan, my question to you would be how we can work together with AFN to help support these inland fishers in northeast Saskatchewan who are going to go through

a real struggle here because their opportunity to have an income once summer hits is going to be gone, and they don't qualify for some of the other things that might be in place.

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** That's a good question, Gary. I'm glad you talked to Grand Chief Hardlotte because they're right there in the PA Grand Council. It has to do with their Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation. It's in Winnipeg now. There's a whole issue about processing, trucking, carrying by planes—all these things. When you start talking about fisheries, everybody automatically thinks of the east coast or the west coast, but there's a very strong inland fishery that needs support going forward. The fishers—I won't call them fishermen because there are a lot of women who fish too—need support in terms of processing, accessing and even marketing. It all has to be supported.

I think the Department of Fisheries and Oceans can work with our AFN chiefs' committee on fisheries to start developing a strategy and a very clear, strategic plan for supporting and developing the inland fisheries across Canada, not only focusing on the east coast and west coast. That's how I would see that. There has to be a very specific program for that.

• (1450)

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** National Chief, do you think the inland fishing people should have been included in the announcement that was made by the government this week to support the fishing industry?

**The Chair:** Answer very quickly, Chief, as we're past our time. Go ahead.

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** Always. The more inclusion, the better. Again, we need to get our people around decision-making tables, so the answer is yes. We have to get more involvement and more inclusion.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

Now we go to Mr. Battiste for another six-minute round of questioning.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** *Kwe.* Thank you very much.

First off, President Chartrand, I want to say that your fish tank with the Métis symbol in the background is the coolest thing I've seen on Zoom so far. That's amazing. It's great.

My questions are to the national chief and the presidents. As advocates for your various constitutionally recognized indigenous nations, your role over the years has been to be advocates in Ottawa for the people you represent. With all of the programs that are coming out, a lot of times indigenous communities don't think these programs apply to them. Now, more than ever, there may be an importance in terms of communicating to the people at the grassroots and to their leaders.

To all the leaders, how are you communicating some of the programs the government is putting out, to make sure people know what they're eligible for and what's being done?

Second, I wanted to give the national chief a chance to finish his thoughts around the socio-economic gap he mentioned when he was going into the throne speech. It's important for us to look at COVID now, but also, as our Deputy Prime Minister has said, we need to skate where the puck is going, not where it is. I'd also like him to comment on the economic recovery, what we're doing and how it's associated with what you heard in the throne speech.

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** Thank you for the question. I'll go to the throne speech first.

This is the first time ever in the history of Canada that there is a whole chapter dedicated to indigenous people's issues. In that throne speech, there is strong reference to the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. That was number one, because if that's implemented, that will create economic stability and economic certainty right across every province and territory. Then there is talk of a treaty commissioner, because we have 634 reserves or first nations across Canada, over 60 different nations or tribes, over a million people, but we have a treaty relationship through sharing the land. This is a lot of land first nations people are sharing with 37 million people called Canadians now. We're sharing land and resources, so the treaty commissioner to implement with the "spirit and intent" was a key piece.

Then there was C-91 on languages and C-92 on child welfare. Then we had the implementation of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and then youth suicide. There was mental health talked about in the throne speech. We are seven times the national average for youth suicide. Then as well there was that the infrastructure gap would be closed by 2030. That's investments in housing, water, infrastructure, all those things—huge things. If the throne speech can be implemented, that will be huge.

In terms of what this government is doing and how we communicate, we communicate to the 634 bands through our newsletters, our updates, our websites and our communiqués. That's what we're doing from the Assembly of First Nations' side. We have constant chiefs committees. We also have a chiefs committee and a COVID task force in place to deal with this. We have the systems in place, no question, but there's lots of work to do post-COVID-19 to kick-start the economy. People on this call should know that first nations have contributed lots through our treaty relationship with the Crown. That's a lot of land across Canada and a lot of resource bases that have been shared to help develop the GDP and the overall economic growth here in Canada.

That's my comment. Thank you.

**Mr. David Chartrand:** If I can, Mr. Chair, I'll add on to Jaime's question.

I was quite surprised by Gary's question because I think it's a wrong approach to the question. First of all, I wanted to commend him personally because he's the only one that raised the Métis issue, the Métis Nation. After the fact of what is happening in La Loche and all the Métis villages, he's the only one that raised the Métis. Everybody used the word "indigenous". For all the people on this committee, please do not use that word because you confuse it all. The testing he's talking about, there is no testing in Métis villages. It's only happening now, after the fact. There was no plan, no strategy to do any testing in our villages, and there's no systemic plan in any fashion. We're having a big fight right now in Manitoba because the province is doing first nations data collection. They say they're doing Métis collection, but there's no dialogue with the Métis government whatsoever. When people use the word "indigenous", they confuse it to look like all of us are getting it. We're not.

To your question, Jaime, we have a very robust communications strategy in Manitoba. We have our own radio show. We have 50,000 listeners on there. We have our own website. We have over 100,000 people coming to our website. We have 25,000 emails that are going out steady to our citizens, advising them potentially every second day of what's going on in government. Our robust communications strategy is very strong. We have about 125,000 Métis in Manitoba.

On the context of where things are moving forward, I think the challenge we face is that Canada has these programs coming out, and they are good. Trust me, they are very good. One of the things I'll commend the Prime Minister on—and I'll hold him to task if necessary—is that the Métis Nation.... You heard Natan say the same thing: distinctions-based, distinctions-based, distinctions-based. That's the only way you can measure success and failures. You have to know who you're talking to and who you're dealing with.

I think those programs that are being announced by Canada are a great opportunity for all of us to tap into. We need to figure out how we get it out as quickly as we can. That's our challenge.

• (1455)

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

That brings us to the next questioner. From the New Democratic Party, we have Ms. Gazan.

Please go ahead for six minutes.

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

My question is directed to Chief Bellegarde and Vice-President Chartrand.

In a CBC article that was published on May 6 about the COVID crisis in La Loche, National Chief Bellegarde noted that first nations are more vulnerable because of overcrowded living conditions and lack of hospital access. Dr. Tam also shared these concerns stating, "People are taking it extremely seriously because these are more vulnerable situations".

La Loche has a population of approximately 2,400 and currently has 111 reported cases of COVID-19. We heard yesterday that in La Loche, Saskatchewan, there now remains only one grocery store to serve a regional population of 6,000, after an employee tested positive for COVID-19 in one of the two regional grocery stores.

I spoke with a community member in La Loche today and she indicated the growing concern in the community—

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Evelyn Lukyniuk):** I'm being asked if you could move your microphone slightly away.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** My apologies. Is that better?

**The Chair:** That's a lot better.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I was saying that I spoke with a community member in La Loche today and she indicated the growing concern in the community, reporting shortages of fresh fruit, cleaning supplies and other essential supplies. Finding affordable food prices now, already much higher in normal times, for seniors, single mothers and low-income people is also becoming more of a challenge.

With 70% of the COVID-19 cases in the far north region, the mayor of La Loche has described the situation as dire. I've heard from my conversations that when people actually test positive for COVID-19 in the region, there is very little follow-up and often-times instructions for self-isolation are only in English.

My question is for Vice-President Chartrand and National Chief Bellegarde. I'm interested in hearing from both of them their perspectives on critical steps that the government needs to take immediately to stop the spread of COVID-19 in this territory.

• (1500)

**Mr. David Chartrand:** I don't see Perry on the screen, so I'll jump ahead of him.

There you go, Perry. I have to get ahead of you, man.

Anyway, I thank Leah for that question, and let me answer this way: It truly is an important prospect, and I think that is what is shown, again, when I talk about the lack of proper planning.

When you look at the northern part of Saskatchewan, I was speaking to Leonard, who is the local leader of the Métis nation there. He himself is actually already putting \$300,000 of investment into that area to support the things you talked about: the food

and supplies and keeping people in their houses, trying to prevent them from walking out of their houses and going to events and potentially passing it even further. Therefore, there are a lot of attempts being made, and already a team.... You heard Perry say that the mayors are meeting, along with the local leaders. The mayor also happens to be the local president of the Métis in La Loche.

When you look at it from the concept there, the strategy we all need to take now, the province and the federal government as well, is to set aside jurisdictions for a second and focus on a war, because this is a war. We need to bring in your team and bring it in quickly, because we start to see Beauval, where there used to be one case and now there are eight. It's slowly drifting into these other Métis villages and the first nation reserves farther in the north. When it moves there, it's going to be very hard to contain and hold back.

We need to act now, no holds barred. Do not hold anything back. Whatever it costs, whatever we have to do, let's stop it before it spreads, because it will cost you 20 times that amount in the future or it will cause a lot of deaths before action is taken.

The strategy we need right now is for somebody to move in with a very full, comprehensive plan, not a band-aid approach, not just saying, "Okay, let's just look at it this way or that way." We need to take a full pandemic approach and get in there now and do everything within our power. Pull it back. Stop it. If you have to put in legislation, or if decisions are holding people back....

We know there are alcohol problems and drug problems in the community; that, we all know. We have to figure out how we capture that group of people and help them and isolate them.

That's what has to be done. We have to look at it within that concept.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you very much.

I want to give National Chief Bellegarde a chance to answer, and then I'd like to follow up with another question.

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** Leah, to support our relatives in the north—

**The Chair:** You have just one minute to answer this. Go ahead.

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** I just got off the phone with Rick Laliberte. They're working on a Treaty 10 pandemic plan. They're starting to develop a plan. The Métis people are working with the first nations people. They're working with the mayors and the chiefs. They're working together from a perspective of geographic area and they're calling it the Treaty 10 pandemic plan.

That should be supported by the province and the federal government.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Absolutely.

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** Support that plan.

They have trailers coming in. They need more PPE. They have ways to deal with the food security. Support that plan, because it's coming from the people who are directly affected: the Métis people and the first nations people. They're working together.

That's what I would urge governments to support, the plan that's coming from the people themselves.

**The Chair:** That's your time.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Okay, thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Madam Bérubé, I apologize. I changed the order by mistake. I have too much paper around me and distractions.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for six minutes, Ms. Bérubé.

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

I'd like to welcome all the witnesses who are here today to the committee.

My first question is for Chief Bellegarde.

You know that many indigenous communities in Quebec face significant administrative hurdles in obtaining funds to help their members. I am thinking of the Mi'kmaq community of Gespeg, which would need \$150,000, but is not eligible for such an amount. It is only eligible for \$50,000. I am told that the Malecites of Viger would also be in this situation.

How do you think the government could make it easier for first nations to access the funding they need more quickly?

[*English*]

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** That is a good question. The simplest way is to work it so that the regional director from ISC works directly with the chiefs and councils to find the quickest, most effective and efficient way to get the resources out. It's one thing to have them, but it's another to find the quickest way out and to cut a lot of the bureaucratic red tape.

That's what has to happen in order to get this out into the community where the resources are needed.

• (1505)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Do you support the first nation of Gespeg, Mr. Bellegarde?

[*English*]

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** Sorry. [*Inaudible—Editor*] support for the Gespeg First Nation? Was that the question? I just want to clarify.

Again, for the Gespeg, working with the RDG, even the minister said if there are problems with the regional director general accessing or getting the answers you need, you can go directly either to his office or the ADM. Dr. Valerie Gideon is doing a good job of being accessible and providing the necessary supports going forward, so if there are issues concerned in the region, then we always look to headquarters, to HQ. A team of officials there should be accessible, and they should be able to deal with the situation that way.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Mr. Bellegarde, the AFN has created a new national COVID-19 task force to help you deal with the pandemic. Can you tell us more about the work of this group, including its interactions with the federal government?

[*English*]

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** Yes, that's a very good question.

At the Assembly of First Nations, we have 10 regional chiefs as well. I have assigned portfolios similar to ministers. We have Regional Chief Kevin Hart for Manitoba, who is in charge of emergency management and is one of the co-chairs. We have Chief Klumane Adamek from the Yukon. Her portfolio is health. So it is between those two co-chairs. We also have Regional Chief Marlene Poitras from Alberta who is a former nurse. She is now a leader. As well, we have Chief Roger Augustine from New Brunswick.

Their main role is to share information, communicate and listen and, as needs are identified from each of the territories and regions, they respond in a more effective and efficient manner. As well, they are there to lobby and advocate on the needs that have been identified in terms of putting pressure on the federal government and our provincial or territorial governments based on what they are hearing from the ground up. They are also calling in different experts from across Canada to share information and best practices, so that we can also share that and communicate that to our first nations.

Those are some of the main roles or functions of the COVID task team that's in place.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much for the question.

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Are you satisfied with the supply of medical protective equipment in northern communities?

[*English*]

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** That's another good question.

We're never going to be satisfied with the supply of PPE or any of the things going into the north. We're saying everything is a good start but more needs to be done. We're going to have to push. My job is to advocate and push to make sure that the governments honour their treaty obligations, their federal fiduciary trust obligations, and when they make commitments.... Both the Prime Minister and Minister Marc Miller made commitments that these funds that had been announced are scalable, which means that they can and should be expanded. Once the needs have been identified, the resources should be put in place.

Again, we say it's a start but they are scalable. The needs are great and so the funds should be...extra resources should be put in place to meet those health care needs that have been identified.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Thank you.

I'd like to ask Mr. Chartrand a question. We know that indigenous people have difficulty complying with quarantine and self-isolation measures because of overcrowding and poor housing conditions.

Could you describe the situation in your respective communities?

[English]

**Mr. David Chartrand:** I have to apologize to my cousins in Quebec. I'm not connected to the translation. Can somebody repeat in English what the question was, please?

**The Chair:** Let me get back to that question. We'll forward it to you on a text or something.

We'll move along to our next round of questioning.

**Mr. David Chartrand:** I do apologize to Sylvie.

● (1510)

**The Chair:** Okay.

Go ahead, please.

**Ms. Mumilaq Qaqqaq (Nunavut, NDP):** On a point of order, Chair, I think that might be one of the issues with some of our sound. Some speakers are echoing for me. We had a bit of a burst of sound. I think maybe not everybody is on the channel that they're speaking in. I wonder if that might be the issue.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that, Ms. Qaqqaq. Our technicians can reflect on that for a moment.

Madam Bérubé, we'll get the information to Mr. Chartrand so that perhaps he can answer later.

We'll move on. We'll keep our cycle of questions going and see how we can clean that up. Right now we have a round of five minutes each. The speaker order will be Mr. Schmale, Ms. Zann, Mr. Zimmer and Ms. Damoff.

For five minutes now we have Mr. Schmale.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** Thank you very much, Chair. I appreciate the opportunity.

Thanks to all of our witnesses for sharing their wisdom with us today. I appreciate their time. I know everyone is busy.

Chief Bellegarde, during your opening statements you talked about some concerns you have about the lack of consultation during the COVID-19 process. Were you given any explanation or an idea of why you and your communities were not included in the decision-making process?

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** We never had any explanation why, but we're going to keep advocating for the need to be involved formally at a lot of those decision-making tables, whether they're at the federal government level or at the provincial and territorial level. I'm constantly hearing from chiefs that they feel left out, that they're put to the side, that they're forgotten. Governments are making decisions that affect our people and have a huge impact, but we're not at the decision-making tables, and that's not right.

We constantly make the point that people have to understand there's another jurisdiction of governance in this country. It's not just the federal government and provincial government. It's not just the British North America Act, 1867, that outlines federal government responsibilities and/or provincial government responsibilities. First nations governments are the original governments of this land, and that jurisdiction is being put to the side, being forgotten. That's the sad part.

If you involve our people, you're going to get better decisions, better outcomes. That's what we keep advocating for.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Even during a pandemic there's no reason for that. Why you should be engaging in that consultation should actually be highlighted.

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** Well, no question. We're going to keep advocating for that.

We have good access to the ministers, but I keep urging my regional chiefs and my AFN executive as well that they should have a good rapport with the premiers. Through EPF financing in the 1960s, the federal government offloaded to the provincial governments treaty responsibilities. It offloaded education, health care and social services to the provinces. Now the federal government transfers billions of dollars to provincial governments.

Again, how are the first nations' needs and rights being met and honoured and implemented? There's a need for full involvement, full inclusion, not only with COVID-19 but also going forward.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** I guess that goes with the situation that our friends in the Wet'suwet'en Nation are dealing with. The elected chiefs said that they were not consulted on the agreement between the federal government....

We should have that openness, that transparency, I would think, whether it be with the Wet'suwet'en agreement, whether it be decisions made with health care, whether it be with funding. I'm just confused as to why the elected chiefs were left out of this decision—and you might not have all the answers.

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** That is another good question, but again, I have to be very careful not to get dragged into something. That is very good. But again—

**An hon. member:** Point of order.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** I have a point of order.

Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** Sorry, I thought we were talking about COVID and I don't want to put the national chief in a position where he has to comment about agreements when this discussion is about COVID. I'd appreciate it if we would stick to that and not put the national chief in a situation where he's asked to answer something he hasn't prepared to answer on this call.

● (1515)

**The Chair:** Ms. Gazan, were you going to comment?

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Yes, again, we had a point of order at the last meeting around COVID. We agreed as a committee to keep our discussions related to the COVID pandemic, given that it's a life-and-death situation. I think we decided to respect that. Once again, I'm asking, Mr. Chair, that we respect that.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Schmale.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** I would also challenge that even during the pandemic, the duty to consult is still there. I would argue it is relevant given that the government has a responsibility for transparency and consultation now.

**The Chair:** I'm going to ask you to restrict your questions and not put Chief Bellegarde in a position that he doesn't want to be in.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Honestly, it was not my intention to put him in a situation like that.

Chief Bellegarde, I'll do this. During your opening remarks, unless I heard wrong, did you say that policing is not an essential service on first nations communities?

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** Yes, policing is not an essential service yet, but we're lobbying and advocating and that's something that everybody on the call should be pushing for, that first nations policing should be an essential service.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Why is that?

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** It's never been looked upon as an essential service for the last number of years, 30, 40, 50, 60 years. They have a first nations policing program and it's cost-shared between the provinces and the federal government.

I have raised this and it is being worked on. Once we get out of COVID-19, that is something that has to be focused on as well.

It's a bigger issue than just policing as an essential service. The overall justice system needs to be reviewed and start moving towards a restorative justice system, not a punitive justice system. That's just some of the work that has to happen. COVID-19, this life-and-death situation, has sucked up a lot of the space, but we can't forget....

Just think of what happened to Brady Francis; think of what happened to Jon Styres and Colten Boushie. There is something that has to be fixed, but recognition of first nations law in governance and jurisdiction, in addition to common law and civil law, is something we have to get working towards in this country.

If you want to start talking about reconciliation, that's where we have to go and it's a bigger picture than just policing.

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

That's our time on that round of five minutes.

We go now to Ms. Zann for five minutes.

**Ms. Lenore Zann (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.):** First of all, I want to say thank you so much, *wela'lin*, to all of the gentlemen who have presented. We're talking about really important stuff today. It's very interesting.

It's wonderful to see Nunavut COVID-free and to see your community there celebrating on television for that incredible milestone. It's wonderful and so uplifting. It would be nice if we could all learn from what you've done.

Here in Nova Scotia we have a number of cases. So far we're doing pretty well in Millbrook First Nation, which is in my community, but I'm always concerned because during the last epidemic we had, which was H1N1, I was actually in government at the time here in Nova Scotia. We were telling folks that pregnant women

and first nations people needed to be inoculated first because it was easy for them to get that particular virus. I was shocked at the racism that this brought up, when people were complaining that our first nations people were able to get in line and be inoculated first. I'm aware of racism, of course, but that really blew me away and I was so disgusted.

As Chief Bellegarde mentioned, there are so many things we need to look at on a larger scale, and COVID-19 just brings out certain things and puts a spotlight on certain things that are already happening.

One thing I'm interested in asking you about is the personal protective equipment. On May 1, the Minister of Indigenous Services told the committee that \$59.8 million had been used so far to purchase personal protective equipment and to support emergency preparedness for the communities, and noted that the funding is in addition to the \$80 million for health emergency preparedness announced in budget 2019. However, prior to the pandemic, did the department consult indigenous communities and organizations about the types and quantities of protective equipment and essential supplies that might be needed in the department's stockpile?

Also, I'm just curious as to how long, on average, it takes for remote and isolated communities to receive the orders that they need of personal protective equipment from the department.

I'm not sure which one of you would like to respond.

● (1520)

**Mr. David Chartrand:** Let me start. Thanks. Nobody has asked that question.

From our perspective let me put it this way: from here to eternity probably, because we never got anything. We didn't get one mask. We didn't get one hand sanitizer. We didn't get anything in our Métis communities. As I said, there are 400,000 of us in western Canada, and we play a very important role in the economy of this country. We pay billions in taxes as a people. I'm not even being treated as a Canadian because of this jurisdictional limbo of who's responsible for us.

When these stockpiles are taking place in Canada, I'm sad to say as a leader that they are not inclusive of us. We have nothing. We don't get one mask. We don't even get one Band-Aid. Let's put it that way. I'm not making this up. This is real and sincere. As I said, last week you heard in the committee when the representative for first nations, Philippe, said that Métis are not their jurisdiction, that that's provincial jurisdiction. You go to the provinces and they say, "No, you have to go back to Canada." We're in a dark zone, and we're not even treated as Canadians, so we get zero.

Thank you for the question, Lenore.

**Ms. Lenore Zann:** Thank you.

Chief Bellegarde.

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** Thank you, Lenore.

It varies across Canada. Like I said, there are 634 first nations, and in your territory there are 13 in Nova Scotia, and they're all Mi'kmaq. There are also two in P.E.I. and two in Newfoundland, and it varies in terms of getting out supplies to the first nations communities.

I also mentioned earlier that we have 96 fly-in communities in the north, and that's a different situation, with more challenges in the north. Even on the ground, Indigenous Services Canada has a responsibility through treaty, through section 35, to provide this, again in exchange for all the land we're sharing. Certain rights and responsibilities and obligations were to be provided to first nations people. They're slow coming out. There's a need for more PPE to be accessible, there's no question.

Again, keep pushing for our full involvement and inclusion in policy design and legislation and programs going forward.

**The Chair:** Thanks, Chief. Thanks, Ms. Zann. That's your time.

We go now to Mr. Zimmer for five minutes.

Go ahead, Bob.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC):** I'm honoured once again to see you, Chief Bellegarde, and Mr. Obed as well. We met in Ottawa a few months ago. It has been a while, but it's going to be great to see you once again in the future.

Mr. Chartrand, I don't know if we've ever met, but it's an honour today.

First of all, I want to speak to the previous point of order.

I think it looks like there's an apparent coverup going on here with the Wet'suwet'en topic. Certainly I'm getting letters about the Wet'suwet'en situation, the MOU [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

• (1525)

**The Chair:** Bob, we've dealt with that.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Frankly, Chair, it hasn't been. That's why I keep getting letters about the situation, but we will move on.

For those who don't know, I am the shadow minister for northern affairs and northern economic development. That's the framework under which I want to ask my questions.

I've met with many of the mining chambers with regard to COVID. Some of the programs don't seem to fit for them, the way they have their infrastructure set up in terms of their funding models and that.

I'm curious to see from your perspective, Chief Bellegarde, how we get our economy going. I guess that's the basic question I'm asking. Testing, you have mentioned, has been somewhat sporadic. We've heard that from Mr. Chartrand and Mr. Obed as well. We see this as the way that really needs to happen. We need to have more testing in order for us to get back to normal, if you want to say it that way.

What has the testing been like in your community? Once again, we will start with Chief Bellegarde, and then maybe go to Mr. Chartrand, and then Mr. Obed.

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** Again, Bob, regarding getting the economy going again, there's no question that's on everybody's mind across Canada. It has to be done in phases, and it has to be done cautiously.

Personally, I think we don't have enough data in certain provinces. Personally, I've said they're moving a little too quickly because a second wave of COVID-19 may come.

Once it's clear that the bell has flattened, there have to be task teams and task forces in every sector. If you're talking about agriculture, there has to be a task team in place. If you're talking about forestry, there has to be a task team in place. If you're talking about manufacturing, there has to be a task team in place.

I sat on the USMCA working with Minister Freeland on that. That's implemented July 1, so even dealing with Canada-U.S.A. in terms of the economy it's going to be another thing to have a specific strategy implementing that going forward.

My whole point is that you have to involve our people around this table sector by sector of the economy. There is only one economy. It's just a matter of where you fit into it. I really think there is an opportunity to build that better. The old ways of doing business are out the door. There have to be new ways to start looking at major programs in clean energy. The clean sector, whether it be wind, solar or hydro; we have to look at investing there. It's putting more dollars into those resources going forward because we have to deal with the Paris climate accord, and we also have to deal with the 2030 sustainable development goals from the UN.

There's a lot of work to do going forward in terms of kick-starting the economy, no question. The testing is never enough. The more testing the better. It has to be quicker and faster.

Those are my comments on that. Thanks for the question, Bob.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Mr. Chartrand.

**Mr. David Chartrand:** Thank you very much, Bob, for that.

Let me say this. From our perspective, testing is clearly—you're absolutely right—one of the keys to solving this or helping to at least curb it in some form or fashion. There's definitely not enough testing taking place across the country. When you look at it from the Métis side—I use MMF, and I've been the president there for 22 years. You look at Manitoba, for example. There are over 125,000 of us here and there is no testing, I'm sorry to say, Bob, in our communities. There's no plan, there's no.... I don't know why. Are they waiting for it to take off and then try to rush in after the fact? That's so damaging. That's after the fact. Prevention is the key.

On the economy side, we definitely have our own economic strategy. We are going to be hiring hundreds of people across the province shortly. Every strategy will have a COVID built-in concept established, whether it's in housing construction or summer student jobs for our youth. We're going to hire thousands of people, without question. Even the students alone, we usually hire about 500 to 600 throughout the summer. We're still planning to do that.



We're going to build hundreds of houses in the province, so we definitely know we need to have a COVID plan. We're doing a bunch of housing repairs worth \$1.5 million. About 100 houses, private homes, will be applying for that. You'll get about two or three workers per every house. You start adding that up and you're talking about 300 workers there.

We're having a plan and we're.... The missing link is the co-operative attachment of how we do it. How do we do it as indigenous governments, and how do we do it with provincial and federal governments? How do we work together on it? If they're not working with us, let me tell you, I'm going ahead anyway because my people need jobs and they need security, but they need to be safe. We are building our own strategy in our own government and moving forward. We're making the message strong and clear.

**Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq:** We're way over five minutes, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. David Chartrand:** Mr. Chair, I can't. This is important.

We're taking advice from all of the medical experts right now in Canada. We're listening to the doctors and trying to follow that direction.

**The Chair:** To the witnesses, there are issues that you want to bring up that can come up later on in further questions. We'll lose track of our meeting rounds if we continually go over.

We're at Ms. Damoff now.

Pam, you have five minutes.

• (1530)

**Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair. I want to start by thanking all three witnesses for their testimony. It's wonderful hearing from all of you.

President Obed, I'm going to start with you. You've been very quiet here. I'm wondering, as the south looks at opening up its economy and we're seeing that more, I'm wondering about your thoughts on the impact this is going to have on the communities you represent in the north.

**Mr. Natan Obed:** Thank you for the question.

I think we're in an unprecedented scenario, of course, but look at the scenario right now for one of our four regions, Nunavut. If individuals choose to fly to the south, when they come back, they have to pay for two weeks of isolation in a hotel before they can come back to the community.

We have no active cases, for the time being, but the prospect of opening up our 51 isolated communities for business in any sort of way is still something that I think is very worrisome to many Inuit in many of the communities, largely because we still don't have point-of-access testing. We still don't have a secure treatment that can happen right now, and we have all the socio-economic conditions that I listed at the beginning of this meeting.

There are very Inuit-specific considerations for northern, isolated, remote communities in reopening our economy and reopening our communities. It will require specific time and investment from the federal government to ensure that we aren't left behind or that we just aren't considered, and that COVID-19 could somehow

make its way into our communities based on the lack of consideration.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Are you being included in the conversations with the provinces on the reopening?

**Mr. Natan Obed:** ITK at the national level is working very closely with the government. Our board of directors, our land claims rights-holding presidents, are working with their respective jurisdictions. Some have better relationships than others, but for the most part we feel in this time there is a sense of constructiveness and a sense of wanting to work together beyond the historical challenges that we, as Inuit, have had with the specific jurisdiction.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Okay.

This question applies to all three, but I'll start with you and then maybe we can go to Grand Chief Bellegarde.

Connectivity has really come to the forefront for all Canadians, but in particular for people in the north, although it's not exclusive to that, because I've got a friend who lives at Six Nations—which is in the south, and it's very urban—and can't connect to the Internet.

Can you just briefly talk about how important connectivity is, both access to the Internet but also the equipment that young people need to access to go to school, for example, or that businesses need to be able to do their work online?

**Mr. Natan Obed:** Just about all of Inuit Nunangat is still dependent upon satellite technology for Internet access. We don't have the connectivity that southern Canada has. We are, and always have been, a generation or two behind southern Canada when it comes to connectivity, and that's had massive impacts on our business, on our education, on our health care systems and on individuals' ability to interact with other Canadians. In this particular moment, there has been a focus on children and having online learning access for schools.

We need things like iPads—connectivity devices—because we have such poverty and such challenges just in having quality of life and standard of living. We also need connectivity within our communities. The same goes for our health care systems and trying to work remotely, and trying to ensure that the suite of health care can still be delivered, even if we're trying to ensure that there is as little travel as possible. Connectivity is essential for the functioning of Inuit Nunangat, and it has been a long-standing concern of ours.

• (1535)

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

We'll go now to a two-and-a-half-minute round, and my first speaker is Ms. Michaud of the Bloc Québécois.

[Translation]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ):** Good morning. Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I'll be brief. Nearly \$1 billion has been announced since the beginning of the crisis. Minister Miller announced that there may be more funding, depending on the needs and how the crisis evolves.

It seems you were consulted very little before the first announcements. Have you drawn up a list of your needs? Has it been costed? What could we propose to the government, before the next announcements, to help your communities?

[English]

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** The answer, quickly, is no. There was no list. There was no formal involvement. The positive thing, though, is that Minister Miller will say that these are scalable. Now that the 634 chiefs have had a chance to see how this affects them—they know their needs—I'm going to stress again to the government and to the proper ministers that, once the needs have been identified, they be met.

These are the words that the Prime Minister and the ministers use: These amounts are scalable. It's clear already that the funding resources, the financial resources that have been identified and have been talked about, don't meet the needs. There has to be more, just to make sure those health care needs that have been identified are met going forward.

[Translation]

Thank you for your question.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you.

[English]

**Mr. David Chartrand:** I can add to that. We three leaders had a discussion with the Prime Minister with respect to what Canada was going to attempt to do and how it was going to go about distributing resources. That helped a lot and gave us a direction; it set the framework for us. Yes, everybody can say it's never enough, but from my perspective one of the key issues was to set the foundation so that the flexibility was there on that money. That was the key. If they had allowed it to move through the red tape and the bureaucracy—no, let's respect the bureaucracy—but if it had gone through that process, the money would have never gotten out the door.

I encourage the politicians to look at these systems, because if that money had gone through there, we never would have gotten it. Thank God that flexibility was there and we quickly reacted in our provinces. Is it enough? We don't know, but right now we're doing a lot of actions like keeping people isolated, keeping people distant and keeping people at home.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Qaqqaq, please, you have two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq:** Chair, my questions are for Mr. Obed.

Just being conscious of our time, Natan, I'm going to ask that you try to stick to about a minute. We saw Pond Inlet in Nunavut had the first false positive case, we also learned at the time they were facing major infrastructure challenges and water accessibility challenges. In Inuit Nunangat, can you give the committee members a better sense of delays in basic infrastructure across the four regions?

**Mr. Natan Obed:** Yes, [Inaudible-Editor] sewer to air transportation. We have certain airports in Inuit Nunangat that don't even have lights on their runways, and no flights are able to fly in after dark.

We have many communities where the water and sewer infrastructure is from the 1950s or 1960s, when these communities were first founded. We still have massive challenges in ensuring that we have the proper water and sewer infrastructure to be able to allow our citizens to follow the public health guidelines that are being really pushed upon us during COVID-19.

**Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq:** *Matna*, Natan.

My next question is in regards to the airlines. I'm hoping that you can give us, once again in about a minute, a better sense of the kinds of services, resources and products that individuals in Inuit Nunangat rely on through airline transportation.

● (1540)

**Mr. Natan Obed:** Yes, ITK has been pushing for the term “essential service” to be used in relation to our airlines, and it's because we don't have roadways to our communities. We don't have railways. We only have sealift resupply for a short window every single summer. Anything else that comes into our communities comes through air.

If these airlines are not sustainable and are not given the proper support in this time, we're going to lose essential critical infrastructure that we cannot replace immediately. We don't want to have our small, isolated communities completely detached from southern Canada, because that's where we get our health services, that's where we get our non-perishable goods in our stores. I don't think that it's been an issue that Canada has considered forcefully enough.

**Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq:** *Matna*, Natan.

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

That brings us to our next round of questioning. I have on this list Mr. Viersen, Mr. Powlowski, Gary Vidal and then Adam van Koeverden.

Mr. Viersen, five minutes.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to our witnesses for being here, we much appreciate your time today.

A lot has changed since we saw you at committee before. It is well known that indigenous women and girls are by far the highest-represented group among sex trafficking victims in Canada. We know that, despite the COVID-19 health measures, the victims of sex trafficking continue to be exploited and exposed to the virus across our country. These victims don't have access to CERB or the other supports that other Canadians have.

Mr. Miller's mandate letter calls on him to work with first nations on the development and delivery of services. To your knowledge, has his department been doing anything to help secure indigenous victims of sex trafficking? Have they been providing funding to any of the groups that work in this area that you know of during this pandemic?

We'll start with Mr. Chartrand, then Mr. Obed and Chief Bellegarde, thanks.

**Mr. David Chartrand:** In fact, the Métis government... what we did in Manitoba is we have a very close relationship.... We actually have RCMP posted right in our building because it's a long-term relationship we've built with them, to work in conjunction with our communities. Second, we actually put the MMF government itself—and I thank you for your interest in that field, that area—we put a \$10,000 reward to help for missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. That's a standing reward we have now to assist our police system to hopefully better entice people to come out as witnesses.

We know that we need to look at solutions, but if you were standing in my building right now, Arnold, you would be quite shocked. Homeless people have set up tents right around my building. You would think this is a third world country. It is quite sad to see so much homelessness right around us in this village and this community, and so many people still using drugs out there. I have seen them with my own eyes, taking needles, from our windows here, and we don't want to chase them away. Where do they go? It is a sad state, but you're right, that's where a lot of these predators take advantage and situations occur where these people go missing.

I'm very encouraged by your ongoing interest in that field, but we're trying to do our best also to help out with the policing system. They can't solve it all by themselves. We have to give our helping hand in some way to give them the tools they need to find these predators.

**Mr. Natan Obed:** I haven't had any direct conversations with Minister Miller about this particular subject, although ITK is working with Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada to meaningfully implement the national calls for justice from the national inquiry. We are coming up on the one-year anniversary of the release of the calls for justice in June. We think this is an essential issue to bring forward in the national action plan and also in continued conversations not only with Minister Miller but also with other relevant federal ministers.

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** It's a big issue. It relates back to the missing indigenous women and girls, and it calls for justice to commit to all the 232 calls for justice. That's where this will rest, and we have to focus on the implementation strategy for that.

That is one big piece, and our Assembly of First Nations Women's Council has the lead and they are developing the plan for implementation.

Another big piece is Bill C-92, the child welfare legislation. We have 40,000 first nations children in provincial care across Canada. That's not acceptable, because that just leads to child prostitution. It leads to gangs. It leads to group homes. It leads to further jail. It is a cycle that has to be broken, so if you can start looking at the full implementation of Bill C-92 and respect first nations' jurisdiction and start focusing on prevention and keeping these children at home in their safe, loving, caring homes with their families and communities and their nations, that's the way to start. So for MMIWG, implement all the calls to action, and start respecting Bill C-92 first nations' jurisdiction over child welfare going forward.

• (1545)

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** In my riding, many of the first nations communities—all of them are Cree first nations—are very tied to the oil patch. Many of them have construction companies, road building, road maintenance and that kind of thing. With the oil price what it is and then COVID on top of that, we're facing unprecedented layoffs.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Arnold, but we've run out of time.

Mr. Powlowski.

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

I want to talk a little bit about the plight of elderly people in your respective communities. This pandemic has really highlighted the plight of the elderly, the difficult circumstances so many elderly people find themselves in.

I have worked as a doctor in Nain and Iqaluit and Norway House, which was the main adjacent Métis community. I would suggest that in all of these communities you do a much better job of looking after the elderly than a lot of non-indigenous communities do.

In Fort William First Nation, they have been trying to get funding for a chronic care home. I'm wondering if you might comment on how the elderly are treated in your respective communities, and what this pandemic has suggested about the treatment of the elderly and the long-term prospects in terms of whether you want chronic care homes in your communities. Maybe you look at how the elderly should be treated in a bit of a different fashion.

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** There is a huge need for elders care homes on reserves. There is no question. More needs to be done on that. Back home in Saskatchewan at Standing Buffalo First Nation with Chief Roberta Soo-Oyewaste, they have an elders care home there. It's been operating for a few years but they don't get much support from the province or anything else. It comes from Indigenous Services, and the rates aren't the same.

You have to have a very specific program for elders care homes on the reserve, and more and more people are demanding that.

Once they leave their reserves, their communities, they go into town and there is racism and discrimination and they can't even get their foot in the door anyway, so there is all of that. If you keep them at home they are surrounded by family, their loved ones. They have their traditional foods. They can speak in their language. They are more at peace and there is a huge need for that need to be met.

We always say our elders are our jewels. We take care of them. They provide so much knowledge and wisdom and teaching for our families and communities, so there has to be a very specific program and it has to be resourced with the proper financial and human resources going forward.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** President Obed, go ahead.

**Mr. Natan Obed:** In our funds that were provided for Inuit-specific response, each of our four regions has specific considerations for elders within the use of those funds, whether that be vouchers for purchase of food at stores or the ability to access country food through community freezers. One of the immediate concerns in each of our regions was how to provide for food insecurity or for basic safety and protection of our elders. It remains one of the great pillars of our society, the way in which we respect our elders and the knowledge that they have.

The risk is also in relation to what National Chief said, around long-term care facilities. There are some long-term care facilities in Inuit Nunangat, but many of our elders have to go to southern care centres. There are many Inuit elders in Ottawa in long-term care facilities. There is a specific risk that some of our population has, based on the lack of infrastructure within Inuit Nunangat. This is just one example.

• (1550)

**The Chair:** Mr. Chartrand, you have about a minute.

**Mr. David Chartrand:** That's a very important question. What's so beautiful about the indigenous culture, in particular my culture—I'll speak, of course, of the Métis nation—is that the elders always come first. That's the number one priority of our systems.

In fact, when COVID was being discussed throughout the media in December, we started talking within our own nation about what we were going to be doing if this ever came to North America. We started reacting very quickly. We were on the phones regularly, steadily, catching the attention of every elder. In Manitoba alone, we contacted over 1,500 elders. They knew the state of their finances, their health.

We also own a pharmacy here in Manitoba, so we made sure that all their prescriptions were intact and in place. We made sure that hampers were delivered to them. We did not want them to leave their houses. We knew they'd be the first and most susceptible to probably losing their lives if they became infected. Our action was very quick in Manitoba with how we took on this case.

It's the same way amongst others in the Métis nation. In our culture, it's fundamental.

As the previous speaker said, there are some key conditions that we face. Canada, for example, takes the position right now, “You're not our jurisdiction”, even though we won a Supreme Court case in 2015. We will hold them accountable for that. Trust me.

On the second phase, we just finished building our first elder campus. We have 10 units built: brand new homes. Let me tell you what I'm proud of as a Métis government. We are going to charge the cheapest rent for everything, intact—cheaper than the Government of Manitoba—for our senior citizens to move in there. They're all quality built to meet the needs of the aging population. I'll give you an example: The plug-ins are higher. If they have a wheelchair, they can go to the stove. Their washrooms are all designed for a wheelchair to move around in there. Their bedrooms are accessible. Everything about the house is designed for them as they age.

We're building seniors homes right across the province.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Vidal, you're next, for five minutes.

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

As we've talked much about in the last few days, and many of my colleagues have identified the serious situation in northwest Saskatchewan, I want to follow up on that a bit. Yesterday in the news from La Loche, the statistics from there were that the largest category of infected cases is in those under 19 years of age. We have the youth who are the most affected in La Loche. It's an increase of 238% since the public declaration of the outbreak.

The leaders, Chief Teddy Clark, the mayor of La Loche, and many of the surrounding chiefs and community leaders—as National Chief Bellegarde talked about—are working together. They've been tirelessly working to get the message out about how important it is for the people there to follow the health guidelines.

In fact, in the Leader-Post today, the mayor of La Loche said, “We keep repeating ourselves but it's important that we stop transferring the virus to other people.... 'Young people think (they're) invincible because they're not in too much danger but the elderly and the vulnerable are. We are very concerned about them getting sick. Please help us stop the transfer of the virus.'”

I would ask this question to President Chartrand and National Chief Bellegarde in this case, because they're familiar with the area.

How can you as leaders, we as leaders, support those people on the ground in getting that message out to the young people, the people in those communities, about how important it is to follow the advice of the public health officials?

**Mr. David Chartrand:** As I said, I do commend you, Gary. You're the first one to raise the Métis name and the whole issue of the media in northern Saskatchewan. It was always indigenous, indigenous, indigenous, and the concept that there was a crisis happening in the Métis community was getting lost.

When you look at the young population—and I was speaking to Leonard, for example, an elected official for the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan out there who lives in the community, and, as I said, the mayor is actually the president of the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan. When you look at it overall, there has to be a dual strategy, and that is a challenge. Young people feel they're invincible. We're trying to educate our people. Even, for example, in Manitoba, we have an education campaign aimed at our young people. We're trying to say to them, "if you don't think it's going to bother you, and you're not going to die or it's not going to affect you, then ask yourself how you are going to carry yourself if it's your grandpa who dies or your grandma who dies because you thought you were invincible?" So we're trying to educate our people that it's not just about one person; it's about our community, about our family.

We're putting out a strong campaign in Manitoba, and I know Leonard and others are trying to do the same in La Loche. It's a challenging issue, but I think it's an achievable issue. I think we can definitely solve it. It goes to the concept we were talking about earlier: set aside jurisdictions; set aside differences. Right now let's focus on people and figure out how we get inside there and begin to work as a team. As Gary said, they're already talking as a team. How do we bring all the tools necessary to convince these young people that even though they're invincible in their minds, they can cause so much harm to their own personal self? And I use "personal" because if you say it's personal, then it might carry some weight of responsibility in that. If you say "somebody else" they might not care, but if it's their grandpa and grandma, they are going to care.

We're pushing that very hard right now because we think that's the only way we can really educate the people. It has to be a campaign. It has to be a dual and mutual campaign, with everybody working together. Set aside everybody's jurisdiction, whether you're a mayor or whether you're a chief or whether you're a local Métis leader. Set aside those issues right now. Whether you're provincial or federal government, come on, get off your heinies about who is responsible. Let's get together. Let's stop this thing before it takes off.

• (1555)

**The Chair:** Okay, we're at time for that. I'm sorry to interrupt, but—

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Chairman, that was only three and a half minutes.

**The Chair:** I don't think so, Mr. Vidal. I had you on at—

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Well, the clock says three minutes and 54 seconds right now.

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** I can answer in 30 seconds.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** Support the Treaty 10 pandemic plan that Rick Laliberte and all the mayors and the chiefs are working on together. Support that. They have a total wraparound within a six-month period to do a whole wraparound for their whole territory, including the Métis people, the first nations people, with all of them working together. They have an integrated incident command centre. That should be supported. The federal government and provincial governments should work with them there.

This all came from Kearn Lake, by the way. An individual who was working in Alberta came back into the community and brought this sickness with them. They went partying and everything else and it started spreading. That's what happened. So to the young people, three things: wash your hands, practise physical distancing and self-isolate. That has to be the constant message to young people. If you love your parents and grandparents—this can affect them—show that you love them and listen and watch and be careful.

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

Mr. Vidal, I'm sorry about that. As each speaker or questioner goes over a little bit, it changes all of the times I have written on my list.

We have a couple of minutes before our deadline, which is four o'clock. I'd like the final questioner on this round to have his opportunity, and then following that the Bloc and NDP would finish the round, which would require 10 more minutes of our time.

I need the permission of the committee, so I'll ask the committee if it could allow the extra 10 minutes past four o'clock.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Excuse me, Chair. I can speak only for the Conservative members, but we do have a meeting at four o'clock. I know you want to get the questions in, but that's just to let you know that all four of us have a meeting after this.

**Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq:** On a point of order, as well, Chair, today the time has not been great at all. There have been lots of people going well over their time, between 30 seconds and a full minute, which limits my opportunity and the opportunity of my colleague MP Gazan to get in more questions. We know we are doing these virtually. We know we should be signing on a half-hour before, making sure our technology works in order to start on time and prevent any further delays. I think it's time that all of us, as committee members, decide we're going to take that extra step to make sure we're ready and we're prepared. We understand we're going to have these difficulties. I would never schedule something at 4 p.m., the same day I had a committee, because of these kinds of things, Chair. I think these are all things that we need to discuss in the future if it continues to be an issue.

**The Chair:** That's the difficulty with virtual; the gestures that we could use before in the committee room are hard to do here. I apologize for that. That's my fault as the chair.

Once again, could we conclude the round with Mr. van Koevenden, the Bloc and Ms. Qaqqaq? What are the wishes of the committee?

All in favour?

• (1600)

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Chair, I just want to say that it's not our doing as the opposition. We'd love to hear the witnesses. We're having a great conversation. But we do have a national caucus meeting, which is beyond just the four of us deciding when it's scheduled. There are a lot of moving pieces to this.

We do have to leave. We're not making this up. We have a national caucus meeting at four o'clock.

**Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq:** Absolutely. I'm not saying that you aren't telling the truth. I'm saying that I'm sure there are ways we can be working around these issues.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** Mr. Chair, since there will be no voting, is it not...?

I'd love to hear what the indigenous parliamentarians from the NDP would like to ask. I think we should afford them the ability to have that conversation and ask those questions, even if the Conservatives have to leave for caucus, which I acknowledge and respect.

**The Chair:** Can I have a comment from the Conservatives on whether that would be okay in view of the fact that we will not hold a vote and at least the evidence will come forward to the analysts and to the rest of the members?

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** We'd need to have pretty solid agreement that there would be no vote.

**The Chair:** Would the committee agree to an extension to allow for the conclusion of this round but not include any other committee business, such as votes?

Is everyone in favour of that? Can I have a show of hands, please?

I think Jamie said yes.

Bob, are you okay with that?

Arnold?

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** Not really.

**The Chair:** The alternative is to end the meeting and not give the other people a chance to make their points or have the testimony collected from the witnesses.

**Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I think this needs to be a broader discussion.

Thank you so much for the opportunity, Mr. Battiste, especially as very few indigenous people are on this committee.

I think it's more than fine as long as we're recording. This is live. This is public. You can see things afterwards. I don't know what the disagreement is from the Conservative member.

Mr. Chair, I think this is a discussion that we need to have. We need to set a time for it and figure it out.

**The Chair:** Once again, to my Conservative friends, would you allow the committee to continue on, based on my suggestion that no other committee business, including votes, take place, other than the receiving of witness testimony based on the questioning?

Jamie.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Sorry, Chair, can you give me two seconds? I'm just conferring with the members here.

**Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq:** Again, this is time when we could be asking questions, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** I know.

**Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq:** Here we are, waiting for something that's taking an unnecessary amount of time.

**The Chair:** I understand that.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** I'm sorry, Chair. I just conferred with my team. As long as there's no vote, we're okay with granting that extension while we excuse ourselves to attend national caucus.

**The Chair:** I really appreciate that, Jamie.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** No problem.

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

Mr. Van Koeverden will have five minutes, and then we'll conclude the third round with the Bloc and the New Democratic Party.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, and thank you, everyone.

**National Chief Perry Bellegarde:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. van Koeverden. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A big thank you—*merci, meegwetch, marsi, nakummek*—to our witnesses today. Your presence here is really invaluable. We have limited opportunity to hear from leaders like you, so I'm really grateful for the opportunity.

I have a question that is specifically for you, Natan. You continually reference Inuit-specific measures to be taken. I'm wondering if you could speak to that just a little bit.

In light of the fact that time is quite limited today, I will then cede the rest of my time to the NDP members to use as they see fit. I think we have fantastic indigenous representation on this committee, and I want to make sure they are provided with the opportunity to ask questions.

Before I cede the rest of my time to the NDP, Mr. Obed, perhaps you could give us some perspective on Inuit-specific measures.

• (1605)

**The Chair:** In view of that, let me interject by saying once you hand it over to Ms. Qaqqaq, I will allow her to continue in the second with the extra two and a half minutes she's entitled to. Then for the Bloc, Madame Bérubé you would conclude the round of questioning if that's okay.

**Mr. Natan Obed:** The biggest point for members of Parliament is the continued lack of continuity between federal departments when it comes to implementing a distinctions-based Inuit Nunangat approach to any sort of indigenous-specific matter. There are announcements almost every day. There are some amazing, different programs going on out there that specifically focus on COVID relief. Some work specifically through a rights-based, distinctions-based approach, and we work with that particular department. In other departments, we start from scratch.

Sometimes something has already been announced and already administrative structures have been put in place for Inuit-specific funds without any conversation with Inuit. When I say Inuit-specific in moving forward, it would be to harmonize and to ensure that no matter what dollar is being spent, no matter what department it's in, the same approach be used by the federal government. That would ensure that no matter what happens, the Inuit-specific response reaches the most people, uses the least amount of money and gets there in the quickest possible way.

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

It's over to you, Ms. Qaqqaq.

**Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq:** Mr. van Koeverden, I really appreciate the gesture. It's very nice.

Mr. Chair, I will be taking about five minutes and the rest of my two and half minutes, I will pass over to my colleague, MP Gazan, if that's okay, so I would have about a minute and a half.

**The Chair:** He used part of his time. Let me give you four minutes now, including the two and a half. Closer to five. Does that work? Okay, go ahead.

**Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Obed, we've heard of multiple different programs, like the Canada emergency response benefit, that individuals can apply for. One of the things I've been hearing consistently, and I'm hoping you can speak to this, is that we've been seeing a lot of people fall through those cracks, in particular artists and artisans. I talk about carvers and jewellers, and I'm hoping you can give this committee more insight as to what that looks like in Inuit Nunangat.

**Mr. Natan Obed:** We still rely very heavily on community-based economic structures, especially for our artists who are selling their carvings or their fine arts locally, and often through cash. Sometimes it is to tourists, sometimes to government workers and sometimes to suppliers who then sell them themselves, but it is largely an informal cash economy. The same thing goes for performers. These are people who are performing throat singing or singing. A large portion of our population wouldn't be able to quantify their loss of income in the same way that other Canadians might. That creates a huge difference in the way Inuit, especially Inuit artists, can apply for a number of these programs, whether it be for businesses or for individuals who have lost income. That is a major concern of ours.

**Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq:** I have one more quick thing before I pass to my colleague, Ms. Gazan.

When we discuss things in the north, a lot of things aren't very simply put, so to speak. What are some of the suggestions you would have around mental health services, something very much lacking throughout the northern Inuit Nunangat? Would you have some suggestions for committee members at the federal level for increasing those mental health services? What starting point would you suggest?

• (1610)

**Mr. Natan Obed:** I think it would be to get as much money to the community-based health support programs as you possibly can. Institutions that keep our communities healthy and well often need a number of different federal programs and provincial and territori-

al programs just to keep their doors open. Those types of community-based organizations are the rock that the mental health of the our communities depends on.

Any federal supports for community-based programs, whether they be for mental health or just community well-being, would be amazing.

**Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq:** *Matna*, Natan.

I'm going to pass it over to Ms. Gazan.

**The Chair:** You have one minute. Go ahead.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you very much, Mumilaaq.

Thank you so much for your graciousness, Adam, and your generosity.

I have a question about clean drinking water.

The Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations noted that indigenous people would be disproportionately affected by COVID-19. The disease has been detected in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario and Quebec first nations and the region of Nunangat. In 2010, in a report about lessons learned from the H1N1 pandemic, the government noted that limited access to running water has been a factor affecting the pandemic response in remote and isolated communities.

Last week in committee, when I asked a question about what the government was doing to ensure real action on ending boil water advisories, they said they would look into it. That was a concerning response considering the government indicated they would end those advisories by 2021.

I want to ask this of one of the panellists, since I know I don't have a lot of time. In your opinion, how has the failure of this government to end all water advisories, as they promised in 2015, contributed to and exacerbated the vulnerability and lack of preparedness on reserves during COVID?

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, one person is going to have to give an answer to this. We're completely over time. I'd like a very brief answer, please.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Thank you. I'm sorry, Chair.

**The Chair:** Could somebody answer, please?

**The Chair:** Perhaps we can get a written answer to that, because this is running way over time. The Bloc has been kind enough to wait.

I'm going to ask the witnesses to give a written response to Ms. Gazan, which will then be incorporated into our witness testimony.

Madame Bérubé, you have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

My question is for President Natan Obed.

The Makivik Corporation spent \$500,000 of the \$11.25 million transferred to it for Inuit living in urban areas, particularly in Montreal. This is money that will not go to the people of Nunavik.

Without wanting to borrow from Peter to pay Paul, does this not show that the \$15 million budgeted by the federal government to help indigenous people living off-reserve will be clearly insufficient?

I'd like to hear your thoughts on this.

[*English*]

**Mr. Natan Obed:** The indigenous community support fund monies that were received by Inuit are not only for Inuit Nunangat communities, but for wherever Inuit live. Each of our four land claim regions has devised implementation programs and supports for urban Inuit.

There are other urban indigenous funds, but, again, the rollout could be quicker. There is a desperate need for more money for ur-

ban indigenous people writ large beyond just the Inuit communities. There are large urban Inuit communities in places such as Montreal, Ottawa, Winnipeg and Edmonton. It has been a challenge, and we have heard a lot of urban Inuit say that the money has not flowed fast enough. However, there are different programs and we have been able to access them, so there is some bridging of the need versus the [*Inaudible—Editor*].

● (1615)

**The Chair:** I will end it there. That brings us to the end of our time. I'm sorry about the timing issues, but we'll get better at it as we go along, I'm sure.

Once again, thank you to our witnesses, Chief Perry Bellegarde, President Natan Obed, and vice-president and national spokesperson for the Métis National Council, David Chartrand.

Our next meeting is Wednesday, May 13 from 11 a.m. until 1 p.m.

The meeting is adjourned.

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