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• (1635)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Marc Garneau (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.)): I would like to call this meeting to order.

[Translation]

I welcome you all to the 48th meeting of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

[English]

We acknowledge that we are meeting on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

[Translation]

Our meeting today will take place in a hybrid format.

[English]

For those participating virtually, I would like to outline a few rules to follow. You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting in French, English and Inuktitut in the first hour, and Plains Cree in the second hour.

You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of using the globe icon for “floor”, “English” or “French”. Please select your language now, and if interpretation is lost, let us know and we’ll try to get it back.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officer.

[Translation]

Please address all comments to the chair.

[English]

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your microphone should be on mute. With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do our best to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, although we have already pre-established that for today.

I have just one housekeeping matter before we start. The next study, as per the motion adopted on November 21, 2022, is the study of improving graduation rates and successful outcomes for indigenous students, also known as the education study. Please sub-

mit your witness lists, organized by priority and by party, to the clerk by February 8.

With that, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on November 21, the committee is resuming its study of indigenous languages. This is our third meeting.

Today, for our first panel, I’d like to welcome R.J. Simpson, Government House Leader, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, and Minister of Justice for the Government of the Northwest Territories, appearing virtually.

[Translation]

We will also hear Dr. Megan Lukaniec, who is a linguist from the Huron-Wendat National Council, via videoconference.

[English]

We also have Dr. Ida Bear of the University of Manitoba, also by video conference.

For our witnesses, you will have five minutes each to make an introductory set of comments, and then we will proceed with a first round of questions. Try to keep your speaking remarks to five minutes to allow the most time possible for questions.

With that, Minister Simpson, if you are ready, you have the floor for five minutes.

We’re not hearing you, Minister.

We’ll go to the second witness, and perhaps we can fix the problem in the meantime.

[Translation]

Dr. Lukaniec, you have the floor for five minutes.

[English]

Dr. Megan Lukaniec (Linguist, Huron-Wendat Nation Council): Thank you very much.

Kwe aweti’.

My name is Dr. Megan Lukaniec. I’m a member of the Huron-Wendat Nation situated in Wendake, Quebec. I am a linguist for our nation.

I am honoured to be here to discuss the Indigenous Languages Act, and the impacts of that act on our community and our language.

Our language, called Wendat, became dormant over a century ago, but since 2007, we have been reawakening our language through the careful analysis of archival documentation.

As of right now, for our nation, there has been no positive impact of the passing of the Indigenous Languages Act. No funding model has changed, this funding was and still is project-based. Furthermore, we have not been contacted by or in communication with the office of the commissioner of indigenous languages.

The only change that we have experienced with the passing of this act is an increase of service work. We have been called upon to participate in numerous consultations sessions, both prior to and after the act. Despite many of the important and insightful comments that I have heard in these sessions since 2018, I have not seen any of these changes implemented thus far.

I humbly present three recommendations to this committee.

The first recommendation is to pass amendments to this act since it has no teeth and is more or less symbolic. I'll give you an example of that. Paragraph 5(d) reads that the purpose of the act is to "establish measures to facilitate the provision of adequate, sustainable and long-term funding", but that's actually not the same as committing to provide adequate, sustainable and long-term funding.

Right now, that means that this funding is dependent on the goodwill of the federal government in power. It is also very non-committal in terms of language rights. We need a commitment that we have the right to educate our youth in our language, and it's especially important here in Quebec with the passing of Bill 96. These rights are mentioned, but they are not explicitly stated in the act.

I also would point you to the legal brief of Karihwakè:ron Tim Thompson of Yellowhead Institute, who provides some thoughtful critique of that.

My second recommendation for this is to change the funding model. Get rid of short-term project funding and its associated problematic measures.

Prior to funding from Canadian Heritage, we actually had a five-year grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. It was a partnership between our nation and Université Laval. We had exponential growth during that period of time since, for the first time, we could plan our activities for five years rather than a single year or even two. We could also modify the project activities to fit our actual needs, which often change from the needs that we estimate at the time of submitting a grant application.

Since we started depending on funding from Canadian Heritage, that was roughly in 2012, our language work has really stagnated. We are stuck on a roller coaster of a grant cycle, and in some ways I believe that this funding has actually set us back rather than moved us forward over the past decade.

The application processing delays are inexcusably long. We once waited 11 months from the time of submission to the time of acceptance of the grant, and of course the deadlines don't change necessarily. You have to ask for extensions. There's also very little flexibility in changing the project activities or the timelines, and there's

no recognition of how their delays impact us in our work and in our language planning.

The bigger reality is that we don't want to do projects. The work that we're doing in our community to revitalize our language is not a project. It shouldn't need to be packaged into something new and shiny each grant cycle, with deliverables that need to be sent to Canadian Heritage after the fact.

Instead, we really hope that the federal government could fund full operating budgets for a period of at least five years to reawaken and revitalize our languages, and not projects with deliverables that are counted according to metrics designed by someone else.

My third recommendation for you is to increase the funding to at least match what is provided to official languages. Dr. Onowa McIvor talks about this very issue in her 2013 article. She says, "it takes greater resources to rebuild something than it does to destroy it." With amounts of up to \$300,000 per year, the funding we receive now is more of a token of support than actual support.

We know that our languages are not being funded at the same level as English and French. We're being told as much during these consultation sessions when we are being asked to provide criteria that will be used to choose amongst the best grant applications. Please don't make us compete against one another for essential funding that is needed to support our languages.

● (1640)

We need this funding to undo the harm the federal government and its other colluding agents have caused to our language. We would like to have at least the same as if not more than what is provided to English and French, because it does cost more to rebuild.

In conclusion, it's been almost four years since the act has passed. We have been waiting patiently. We are still without any adequate, sustainable, recurring and long-term funding for our language. The current funding amounts and current funding model are both unacceptable and will not permit us to effect real change in our community in terms of language revitalization.

We are now coming up against a funding gap since we had a two-year grant from Canadian Heritage that will end on March 31. There are no other funding calls that are available despite the fact we were told that these new funding models would come into effect in the spring of last year, in 2022.

I implore you to act fast because we're doing all we can on our end to sustain and nourish our language, but we really need the federal government to commit itself to help us rebuild from the damage they caused our language. We need this financial support, and we need it now.

That is all.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Lukaniec.

We'll now go to Minister Simpson.

Minister, you have five minutes.

Mr. R.J. Simpson (Member of the Legislative Assembly, Hay River North, Government House Leader, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, Minister of Justice, Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories): Thank you very much. Good afternoon. *Dánet'eh, dze nezi*.

Thank you for inviting me here today.

The Northwest Territories is the only political region in Canada that recognizes 11 official languages. Of these languages, nine are indigenous: Dëne Sųhné Yatıé, nēhiyawēwin, Dinjii Zhu' Ginjik, Inuinnaqtun, Inuktitut, Inuvialuktun, Dene Kədó, Dene Zhatié and Tı́chq Yatı, with many different dialects throughout our 33 communities.

The NWT Official Languages Act sets out the roles and responsibilities of the ministerially appointed language boards that represent the 11 official language communities, the Languages Commissioner and the Government of the Northwest Territories, and it provides legal protection to assist in preserving culture as expressed through language. The act states that everyone has a right to receive government services in the languages they speak.

Each of our indigenous languages articulates the ways of knowing, being, doing and believing that are unique to their own communities and histories. This is why it is so important to work to ensure that our children and youth retain a strong connection to their language and who they are. It is our responsibility, as a government and as individual citizens, to protect, strengthen and promote our languages to ensure that we are a territory in which indigenous languages are supported, respected and thriving.

The Government of the Northwest Territories provides approximately \$15 million per year to indigenous governments in the NWT—communities and education bodies. Combined with the \$5.9 million from the 2021-24 Canada-Northwest Territories Agreement on Indigenous Languages, the GNWT distributes approximately \$21 million towards the promotion, preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages each year.

Funding provided through the GNWT is used to support language revitalization programs for individuals and communities, and is also distributed directly to governments, communities and education bodies to develop and provide their own language revitalization programs.

Our work is guided by input from our language partners, and over the years, we have learned that this coordination is essential to the success of achieving our shared vision. We have built relation-

ships based on trust and transparency to find solutions that work within the unique context of the Northwest Territories.

The federal Indigenous Languages Act provides room for a variety of indigenous language revitalization and protection efforts, and, from a legislative perspective, aligns well with the NWT's Official Languages Act. However, the GNWT would like to see improved coordination of funding for language revitalization and service delivery initiatives to improve efficiency and better support strategic objectives in our territory.

Although additional support for language revitalization is welcome, the current disparate approach to program funding has contributed to issues of duplication and persistent capacity issues that limit revitalization work. To be clear, I am not advocating for the redirection of funds from indigenous governments to the Government of Northwest Territories, but for enhanced coordination. The Government of Northwest Territories would like to work more closely with Canada and indigenous government partners to support strategic objectives, create efficiencies and help address the lack of capacity across our language communities.

Although we see general alignment with our legislation, several areas of the Indigenous Languages Act at this time are not clearly defined, such as the use of the terms such as “support”, “access to services”, “sufficient demand” and “capacity”. Not having these terms properly defined makes the impact of these requirements hard to judge.

The Government of Northwest Territories understands that our indigenous languages need support, particularly those spoken in rural indigenous communities. Beyond dollars, capacity issues must be strategically addressed for revitalization funding to be effectively spent. For instance, currently only two out of our seven regional indigenous language coordinator positions are filled across indigenous governments in the Northwest Territories, which poses significant challenges to implementing revitalization programs across our territory. Greater coordination between Canada, the GNWT and indigenous governments could help identify and target such issues in a more systematic and strategic way.

I would like to thank the committee for inviting me to provide feedback on this important initiative, and I look forward to continued coordination of funding for language revitalization and service delivery initiatives with the Government of Canada.

Thank you.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Simpson.

We will now go to Dr. Ida Bear of the University of Manitoba.

You have five minutes.

Ms. Ida Bear (Teacher of Indigenous languages (Cree and Ojibwe), As an Individual): [*Witness spoke in Swampy Cree*]

[*English*]

My western name is Ida Bear. I am at the University of Winnipeg, not the University of Manitoba.

I just want to do a qualifying statement. In 1967, I got involved in language and culture work. I remember sitting down on a Saturday afternoon with a few other people who were concerned about our languages in our communities—and we're separated, north and south. The south of Manitoba has better access to resources; the north does not.

At the time, in 1966-67, our schools were still federal schools. It was not until 1973-74 that we began to take control of our schools.

I have seen history in the making. I am in my winter years. I have seen development over the long time I've been a schoolteacher in the public school system. I have also been teaching for many years at the post-secondary level. One thing that I want to congratulate the federal government on is the languages act. It's been a long time coming.

When we were sitting down, eight of us, we were saying, "We should have our languages protected, like French". It was more like wishful thinking at the time because nobody was listening to us when we were sitting at the department of education of the provincial government. We were teaching English as a second language, and then we had bilingual programs. All the kids who came to school spoke the language. We knew that the language was safe and healthy in the communities if the little ones came to school at age four.

Fast-forward to 2023. You can go to any school in Manitoba, and you will not have one student speaking their language, whether it's Dakota, Dene, Inuktitut, Michif, Cree—my language—Ojibwa-Cree or Ojibwa. We have seven language groups in Manitoba, and we're divided, north and south.

As a community person, and also as a grandmother and a great-grandmother, I was really quite surprised when I got an invitation to appear before the standing committee. I said, "I don't know anything about what happened with legislation. All I know was that in 2018 and 2019, there was discussion about the languages act and what it would do."

Certainly, it's not as efficient because it's only been in operation since 2019. The work of language disintegration and culture has been in the making for 500 years, and so with this languages act, I sat back and said, "Hmm. It's going to take a while before we see progress." I know because it took a long time for us to get moving in looking at language and culture, working with our communities to say that language is important and so is culture.

I'm the last remaining person in my generation from where I come from who has knowledge of language and culture as it was before modernization took place. We have different things happening in indigenous communities, and it's all modern. I think people

from the past would be very shocked to see the kinds of things that are being done in languages and culture—good intentions.

With that, I wanted to make the point that many of us have been in this work a long time. I said, "Finally, we have a languages act", but it's too bad I didn't know anything about it after it was passed and how the funding was taking place.

• (1650)

Yesterday and today, I quickly got some information. Thank God for the Internet that you can access information as quickly as you can for languages information. I looked for the Nisga'a. As a student, I loved Frank Calder, because he had the Nisga'a language and the elders recognized that they could go to court and use their oral history. I'm a storyteller by trade. I said, "Yay."

Years down the road, the Nisga'a got quite a lot of money for documentation, and they have done the process with Thomas Berger and so forth when they were negotiating for their land claims. We didn't have that here in Manitoba. It was just our little groups that got together and said that language was so important. We initiated the bilingual program in 1973 and ran that for about five, six or seven years with the federal government and the provincial government doing a joint program. That was with Title IV in the 1960s in the States. A whole bunch of people went down to Rough Rock and Window Rock to look at the bilingual program.

The scariest thing is that we were trying to teach English. None of the children in our schools spoke English. Fast-forward to today, and none of the kids speak their indigenous language.

We do have funding. I have just a few seconds, and I have a list here. I think there has to be a better coordination in looking at the funding proposals. It has to be tighter. Also, the community, and I don't mean the chief and council or the mayor's office or anything.... I'm talking about community people. They have to be made aware of what language planning is and of the role of language, and then get themselves organized and structured so that they can be better able to have efficient language retrieval programs. Also, the last point—and my time is going here—is the Internet. We have really big issues with Internet service for our northern communities. I teach at a virtual high school here, and our communities cannot get online because they can't access the Internet to hook up with us where we teach language and culture.

Thank you.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Bear, and my apologies for getting your university wrong. It's the University of Winnipeg.

We'll now go to the first round of questions, and we'll begin with Mr. Melillo for six minutes.

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses for joining us today for this important discussion and for being part of this study. I thank all of you for your testimony.

So far what has struck me is that each of the opening remarks really touched on the coordination aspect of the programs from the federal government.

Dr. Lukaniec, you mentioned the lack of a positive impact from the Indigenous Languages Act. You mentioned the need for language rights and passing some amendments to sort of beef that up.

I find this very interesting for a number of reasons and very concerning for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that we've seen a lot of reports from the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the Auditor General recently pertaining to Indigenous Services and how, over the last number of years, there have been a lot of resources and dollars allocated but not necessarily a commensurate increase in the results. I think that's a major gap we're experiencing that we're seeing across the country. Each of you pointed that out, and quite rightly so.

With that in mind, in thinking about the results and the outcomes that we obviously need to be striving toward, Dr. Lukaniec, I'll come back to you again, since you started off. You mentioned the need to pass some amendments for the Indigenous Languages Act in order to strengthen it. I'm wondering if you could speak in more detail to some of those specific amendments.

Dr. Megan Lukaniec: Yes. *Tiawenhk*. Thank you.

I think there are two that are pretty concerning.

One is the way in which the act doesn't speak directly to the heart of what the purpose is. In the purpose of the act it's to "establish measures to facilitate the provision of". Never is there a specific point where it says that the federal government "is committed to providing adequate, sustainable and long-term funding for...Indigenous languages". That appears in the preamble, but it does not appear in the purpose of the act.

The other piece of it is with respect to language rights. It's mentioned that there are specific points at which indigenous language rights are a piece that should be looked at, and it says that the Indigenous Languages Act would support indigenous language rights, but it does not explicitly describe those rights. That is pretty problematic, especially here in Quebec with Bill 96 and with the fact that now we're seeing this encroachment of the French language on indigenous languages.

Indigenous languages are not the threat to French. English, not indigenous languages, is the threat to French. We're in a different situation here in Quebec as well, so those amendments would be particularly helpful for those of us here in Quebec with this encroachment.

• (1700)

Mr. Eric Melillo: I appreciate that. Thank you.

Just in the interest of time, I will try to move through to the rest of the witnesses as well.

Minister, you also mentioned the need for improved coordination of funding. I wonder if you could speak to that as well. I'm curious

regarding your experience with how the federal government has worked with the government of your territory as well as with the indigenous governments within it. Perhaps you could speak to some of the successes and some of the things that have not gone so well.

Mr. R.J. Simpson: Thank you very much.

I won't speak too much to the operational side of the collaboration because I don't really get to see that side, but I know there are instances when I look at the news and realize that the federal government has given millions of dollars to indigenous governments for indigenous language revitalization. That's great, and I have no issue with that, but when it comes as a surprise, it's clear that there is a lack of coordination. We have developed good relationships with the indigenous governments in the Northwest Territories. We're all working together to revitalize languages. Bringing the Government of Canada into that fold as well would, I think, go a long way.

I want to make very clear that I don't want to step on the toes of indigenous governments. If they prefer a nation-to-nation relationship, then that's fine. We have been working well together. I know there is more we can do.

We've been running a number of programs. Some have been successful at really sparking a lot of interest and passion for languages in communities. We have a mentor-apprentice program that pairs language learners with those who have a language. Speaking with people in that program, I really see that we're at a turning point now, where this generation is really invested in language. The younger people are making an effort to learn their language, and they are passing it on to their children. I know someone who is just learning the language. They are in their thirties. Their two-year-old is more fluent than they are now. It's almost skipped a generation. We are making progress, but we just need to work together a little more closely.

I will follow up with a written response on the operational side of that as well.

Thank you.

Mr. Eric Melillo: I appreciate that.

I don't really have a lot more time, but I have just maybe a quick question for you, Minister, on that coordination aspect.

Is it along the lines of the federal government perhaps not being responsive or understanding some of the specific realities of the communities in the territory? Where do you find there is a lack of coordination from that perspective?

Mr. R.J. Simpson: I respect the fact that the Government of Canada wants to work directly with indigenous governments. As I said, I wouldn't stand in the way of that. To have the conversation with respect to how we can work more closely would get us moving in the right direction. Once we start having those conversations, we ultimately get to where we need to go and we do work better together.

Thank you.

Mr. Eric Melillo: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Melillo.

We'll now go to Mr. McLeod for six minutes.

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the presenters who are here today.

I think I'm the only MP who attended Indian residential school. The language that was spoken there was the strap. Everybody who spoke anything other than English was strapped.

My parents spoke three languages. They spoke the Métis French, they spoke English, and they spoke the Dene language, their indigenous language. By the time I left school, I could speak only two, even though I didn't speak English until I started school at six years old.

My children can speak only one. Now, if I want to go back and try to learn the languages, I can go to a nice facility and learn English and I can go out to a nice facility and learn French, but there is no place for me to go to learn the indigenous Dene language. That's the same for my children, so I listened with interest to Dr. Lukaniec when she talked about funding parity. I believe it's going to be a real challenge for us to save some of these languages.

I just want to ask you if you could talk a little more about what it's going to take, compared to what's being invested in the French and English languages, to save some of the indigenous languages.

• (1705)

Dr. Megan Lukaniec: *Tiawenhk* for this question.

I think there's a lot more that is involved. I think the metaphor of rebuilding is a useful one to think of here, because we're not going to be able to simply go on the Internet for language teachers, find material to teach for English or French and pull it into the classroom and have supports and environments where students can be immersed in the language outside.

Those things don't exist. Those supports don't exist. Those resources don't exist. We need to build them, and for my community, without speakers—we're trying to build a new generation of speakers—that takes an enormous amount of time.

We need funding for research. We need funding for curriculum development. We need funding for teacher training. We need funding for accreditation. We need funding to build a language authority and to actually pay individuals to be hired to be in full-time adult immersion programs, like the programs that exist at Ohsweken Six Nations or Kahnawake. That's where we would like to head, but with the current funding we have, there's nothing that is going to get us even close to that.

We know that we're not being provided even adequate funding for a minimum of things we need to do, for essential things that we need to do in order to reawaken our language. In terms of the budgets for English and French compared to indigenous languages, when you think about how many indigenous languages there are here in Canada compared to just two colonial languages that have caused this damage, it really is shocking to think of the disparity between the budgets that are allocated by the federal government.

Mr. Michael McLeod: I am probably going to ask you a dozen more questions here, but I want to ask R. J. Simpson, who has joined us from my neck of the woods, a couple of questions.

I'd like to first of all acknowledge that today is the first day of Indigenous Languages Month in the NWT, so I'd like to say *mahsi cho* to R.J. for appearing.

I was quite happy last year. We announced \$17.7 million from the Government of Canada to support the Canada-Northwest Territories Agreement on Indigenous Languages. As the minister has indicated, we have nine official indigenous languages, but there are more. The Michif language, which we heard about the other day, doesn't get recognized in the Northwest Territories, and there are several others.

A number of these languages are still being spoken in the communities, but if you talk to the elders, they say that a lot of the language is now being watered down. The younger people are speaking a different version. The language is not as strong.

I'd like to ask the minister if he could explain how the GNWT is working with those communities like the Gwich'in communities, because the Gwich'in language is expected to disappear in 10 years if we continue the way we're going. I'd like to ask him how he's working with those communities where the language is actually threatened.

Mr. R.J. Simpson: Thank you, MP McLeod.

I will say that I'm in a similar boat to MP McLeod. My grandfather spoke four or five different languages. Now it's down to one: I've lost all of my traditional languages as well.

The Government of Northwest Territories provides funding to the different indigenous governments around the Northwest Territories for indigenous language and education coordinators. Those positions all work together across the territory to ensure that we have the capacity to do certain things. A lot of communities have very small language communities within them, and they don't have the capacity to do that work, so that is one way we provide support to them. The Gwich'in provide an example of a government that is doing a lot on their own as well. We're happy to support them in kind whenever we can.

We support organizations in a number of different ways. There is broadcasting support for radio stations. If a community wants to have their indigenous language over the airways, we have support for that. There's professional development support. We do all sorts of different things. I can provide to the committee a list of all our supports and how we fund them in writing as well, just recognizing the time.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Your time is up.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Gill, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank all the witnesses who are here with us today.

There are indeed many common threads in the various testimonies, such as the issue of linguistic depletion. Mr. Simpson has just spoken about this.

Personally, I know my ancestors spoke Abenaki, Mohawk, French and English. And yet, at home, we don't speak any other languages currently apart from French and English. I understand the issue firsthand.

I liked the expression used by Dr. Lukaniec, who spoke of a dormant language and not a dead one. A dormant language is just waiting to be reawakened. I found that most interesting. We sometimes get the impression that in order to speak a language, you just have to buy a textbook or take a class, but it's much more complicated than that.

I would like to hear more about funding from Dr. Lukaniec. She spoke of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, amongst others, and the fact that it was easier in the past to plan over five years.

A new act came into force in 2019, but everyone agrees that the act doesn't have enough teeth and that it is vague. The act does indeed provide guidance and direction, but does not make anything mandatory. Ms. Bear also spoke about this when she talked about languages that are being lost.

So what should we do exactly? The act was passed almost four years ago and just like you, I like to believe that we can do something.

Dr. Lukaniec, what can we do right now in order to reawaken these dormant languages? As a linguist, you are best placed to explain how difficult it can be.

• (1710)

Dr. Megan Lukaniec: [*Witness spoke Wendat*]

Tiawenhk inenh

[*English*]

I can tell you that it is truly difficult to reawaken a dormant language and that it requires a lot of funding.

There's another problem. With the current funding model put in place by the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, we are not able to measure results on a monthly or yearly basis. The results from my community and many others must be measured over decades.

It is therefore difficult to set up projects when there's only funding for nine months. You have to organize the project from beginning to end. You have to be satisfied with what you get and set new timelines. Of course, we never get an answer to our request in time to start work on the date that we have set.

What's more, planning is really complicated; we can never do any long-term planning. And yet, that is precisely what we need right now: funding and support. That would allow us to establish long-term plans. Otherwise, spoken Wendat, even in the Wendake community, will decline and we won't be able to record the knowledge of speakers who are still alive. We are also feeling tremendous pressure. We need that long-term funding.

There is too much to do and not enough time and the deadline is not realistic.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Dr. Lukaniec.

You spoke of the urgency of the situation, because if we don't act, the number of speakers of certain languages will decline. I remember when we heard representatives from the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador, who also spoke of this urgency. I believe that was the impetus for this study. If we don't act decisively now, certain languages will disappear. As you said, some nations no longer have people who speak their ancestral language. This is a point I wanted to raise, and I'm not sure if you agree with this.

What will be the consequences in the medium and long term if we don't change the funding model?

Thank you again, Dr. Lukaniec.

Dr. Megan Lukaniec: If we don't change the funding model, other communities will absolutely find themselves in the same situation as us, which is something I do not wish to see. In 2017, we started an in-depth study of manuscripts and archival documents. That took many years. I myself took language training to be able to speak my ancestral language. I spent six years at the doctoral level and three years while doing my masters. That was nine years of study in order to do the work that I'm doing right now, which is to reconstruct a language using archival material. It requires an enormous amount of research.

I will say that the situation is urgent, because other communities may find themselves in a similar situation, and they might not have as much documentation as us. We have to change the funding model and get the funds that will allow us to do our work. We need funding over a minimum of five years, rather than one or two years.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gill.

[*English*]

Ms. Idlout, we'll now go to you for six minutes.

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

To all of you who gave a presentation, I thank you all. What you said is very important, and what you said is very relevant, as you all pointed to coordination as an item.

To Dr. Ida Bear first, when it comes to indigenous peoples and their languages and the Indigenous Languages Act, I look at the content. It's a good act, but it doesn't state anywhere in the act that we need to heal from past abuses and the destruction of our own language. It states that we need to work together, but our language was meant to be lost forever, according to a government policy. Many people are hurting, angry and in need of healing from this abuse.

Can you strengthen the act by adding that financial resources should be available for healing purposes also if we are going to reclaim our languages, which we were forced to give up?

I ask Dr. Bear. Thank you.

Ms. Ida Bear: I did a presentation on Monday, just the other day, and we were talking about language and self-esteem. I asked a question: Who am I? Well, you can look at me externally and say, "You're an indigenous woman. You're an older woman. You might be a great-grandmother." But nobody can tell by looking at me that I have worked years and years and years in post-secondary institutions and also in the community, which I think is very important.

I too came out of residential school. After spending all my childhood there, my youth, I came out a changed person. How do you have healing? You do healing through the language and culture. When I went in, I was five years old. Already I had the language. I had my values and teachings from my grandparents. When I went in, everything was different. There was a lot of corporal punishment and abuse, sexual abuse and physical abuse. You came out as a nobody with no self-esteem.

We're advocating through the language and culture program things like land-based education and using traditional doctors—I'm one of them—for healing of the soul and spirit, but we don't get funding for it. We've been running programs like that for a long, long time without any assistance from the federal government. It's through our local initiatives. I think about it this way: Money doesn't really heal anything, but it sure as heck would help us to do the work in the area of healing. For example, a lot of people say that today it's contemporary times and the past is dead. No, it isn't. The past is just hanging over you with all its negativity, all its hurts and all of whatever it was they did with colonization, turning us in to western automatons leaving behind our identity—who we are.

I'm Cree through and through. I do have French on my grandfather's side. I have Scottish on my maternal side, but we all identified as Cree in culture and language. You know, up to five years old, you already have that language. You never lose it. It's like a computer. It's inputted. It's just that psychological processes come into play where you can't get it out.

That was the case for me. In 1974, when I began to get involved in languages and culture, I couldn't even speak my language. I had to get it out, but there were so many obstacles. There were psychological obstacles. There was panic, I would say, in using my language, because there was too much corporal punishment when we'd use our language. In terms of cultural practices, when my mom used to come and visit us, there would be a supervisor. We had 10 minutes with my mom. She would try to bring traditional foods. They would just throw it out as not fit for dogs. There was this demoralizing way of treating us.

I agree with you that within that languages act we need our indigenous doctors, our healers, our psychologists, our psychiatrists, people like me and ceremonial people to be paid for the work we're doing and not to just be given tobacco in a piece of coloured cloth. That doesn't pay for your food. That doesn't pay for your accommodation.

Many of the people doing that work are long gone. The last one died a month ago. We really don't have that pool of traditional healers who do the language and culture work. Since 1967 we've had a core group of us working toward the revival of language and culture. Through the work in language and storytelling and cultural-based activities and ceremonial activities, many of us found healing.

• (1720)

Where we found healing, we got our voice to say, "Okay, we're going to put the western ideology aside. Now we're going to spend time looking at us, at who we are as a people." We're very diverse, but as indigenous peoples we have universal principles.

We have soul; it's in our language. We have spirit; it's in our language. When we speak our language and we openly speak it, the Creator Otipéyihcikéw hears us and we begin to heal. We need people who are healthy, who are healed, to be able to reach out to the people who need healing.

When I quickly went over the Indigenous Languages Act, I was thinking about that. I said to myself, you know, through language and culture we get healing. We get land-based education. We go to ceremonies. We go to sweat lodges. We go to shake tents. We go to pipe ceremonies.

Our psychologists, our dreamers, are different types of doctors. They're healers of the brain. Nobody recognizes us. Some of us have three, four, five or seven Ph.D.s in ceremonial aspects. We're still very much looked down on, and they say, "Well, you don't have a Ph.D. from a reputable university. You didn't spend nine, 10 or 11 years doing a study." Our people have worked and lived all their lives in what we call *miyo-pimâtisiwin*, "the good life". How do you get at that good life? Practise your culture. Practise your language. Eat your traditional foods. Have your ceremonial name.

My name, and it's kind of comical, is Ká-kisiyásit. I wanted a beautiful name like "Yellow Buffalo Woman" or "Blue Robin", or all of those nice names. When I got my name, it was Ká-kisiyásit, meaning "one who flies fast". I told my medicine name-giver, "I don't want that name." He said, "It's not I who gave your name. It's Otipéyihcikéw, the Creator, who gave you that name." One who flies fast—that's here, the soul, the spirit.

You can cover a lot of territory for healing, for spiritual teaching, by teaching the language, by being able to pray in a language when you're asked or to counsel somebody who sits there and says, "I don't feel like living anymore. I don't speak my language. I don't know any ceremonies. What am I going to do?"

You went into that whole phase. When you had your people doing the consultation, I wasn't involved, so that part was missed.

I agree with Dr. Megan—I don't know how to pronounce your last name, and my Cree gets in the way—that we should actually look at redrafting or making amendments to include that.

Do you know something? I think it's a positive thing. Back in 1967 we said we needed to save our languages. How many years ago was that? It was roughly 40 years ago. This is 2023. We've lost many of our languages. It wasn't enough for some of us to do the little piecemeal things we were doing. My colleague and I covered all the communities in Manitoba. We set up language working groups back in 1983 and 1984. Once we left, because we didn't train the trainers, it died, and there was no ongoing work done on working with the community, the parents, the grandparents, the ones who have no education.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Ms. Idlout.

[*English*]

Thank you, Dr. Bear, for sharing that with us.

Thank you very much today to Dr. Megan Lukaniec and Minister Simpson for giving testimony and for answering our questions as we continue to study the issue of indigenous languages. I know it's a subject that has been around for a long time. There's a certain amount of impatience with respect to it, so thank you for your testimony today.

With that, we'll take a short break and prepare for the second panel. Thank you.

• (1725)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1730)

The Chair: Welcome to the second panel.

I would like to welcome those who are with us today.

In person, we have Ms. Claudette Commanda from the First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres, and Dr. Kevin Lewis of the University of Saskatchewan, who may speak to us in Plains Cree, but we'll see.

I understand that your mother may be involved in translation as well. Welcome.

Also, Dr. Lorna Williams is with us by video conference from the University of Victoria.

Welcome to our three guests as we continue our study of indigenous languages.

The way we do it is that we ask each of our witnesses to make a five-minute opening set of remarks and then we proceed with questions.

For the benefit of Dr. Williams, if you don't understand some of the languages that are being spoken, you have a little globe at the bottom of your screen where you can choose which language you wish to understand. There may be some French. There may be some Plains Cree. It's good to set up beforehand.

With that, I will ask Ms. Commanda to begin with five-minute opening remarks.

Thank you.

• (1735)

Ms. Claudette Commanda (Chief Executive Officer, First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres): Thank you.

Good evening. I am Claudette Commanda, member of the Kiti-gan Zibi Algonquin First Nation.

I welcome you. I'm honoured to make this presentation on the ancestral territory of my people.

I hold various titles, responsibilities and roles, such as chief executive officer for the First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres. I am an Indian day school survivor. I am a representative plaintiff for the survivor class federal Indian day school settlement; a special adviser on reconciliation to the dean of the faculty of law; elder-in-residence; professor; and chancellor of the University of Ottawa. I am a mother of four and a kokum—or grandmother—of 10; this is my most cherished role and responsibility.

Despite the various titles and roles I hold, today I am here as the chief executive officer representing the First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres. I have been with this national first nations grassroots organization since 2000.

The FNCCEC was established in 1972. We are a non-profit, national, first nations grassroots organization born out of Indian control of Indian education. Our organization is community-based and grassroots-driven, and we are inherent and treaty rights holders. We are independent from the Assembly of First Nations or any other political entity.

The organization is composed of 46 cultural centres, which are located in every part of the country and represent the language and cultural diversity among first nations. Our elders guide our work and support our community-based and national role as language advocates and language experts. The organization provides technical and program assistance to communities in their development and delivery of language and culture-based education programs.

As rights holders of our languages, the FNCCEC and its member centres understood the need for languages legislation: legislation to guarantee financial support for communities to develop immediate and long-term sustainable solutions for language revitalization and protection, and our right to educate our children in our ancestral languages.

For 47 years, FNCCEC was entrusted—and continues to have that trust—with a national mandate on the promotion, protection, revitalization and maintenance of first nation languages, cultures and traditions. Despite our organization's expertise in language development and program delivery for our communities, FNCCEC was not called on to be codevelopers in the drafting of the languages legislation known as Bill C-91.

However, our organization supports the Indigenous Languages Act. We were pleased to see our vision, our efforts and our actions for language protection become a reality. For decades, with steadfast determination, the FNCCEC advocated for language legislation. Language champions such as Ron Ignace, Verna Kirkness and Amos Key, to name but a few, remained constant in their support of FNCCEC and our mission for legislative language protection.

Why is the act important? What does it mean for the First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres?

We see the Indigenous Languages Act as a validation of our languages. It validates the importance of our languages and the richness of our languages for cultural identity and healing. In building self-esteem for first nations children and youth, the validation of our languages for the intergenerational transmission of knowledge is so critical and so important, because our languages are who we are: our identity, our culture and our life, and that connection to land, to spirit, to the creator and to all of our teachings.

The Indigenous Languages Act is also viewed as the Government of Canada's acknowledgement of the historical wrongs that have contributed to language loss. It is also viewed as an instrument to hold the government accountable in its obligation to support the restoration, revitalization and retention of first nation languages with an ongoing commitment for funding needed for immediate and long-term language planning, resource development and language learning.

● (1740)

The protection of the first languages of the land is paramount. After all, first nation languages, indigenous languages, are the original languages of Canada. Canadians must embrace this truth. Raising awareness of the importance and the value of first nation languages provides the opportunity for Canadians to acknowledge, respect and celebrate first nations people, our histories and our rights, and to foster reconciliation, people to people and nation to nation.

We are hopeful and we wait patiently for the act to provide permanent sustainable funding, funding that is of critical need for our communities to build and foster language health both today and lifelong. The act must be the authority to eliminate proposal-driven, piecemeal funding. The current language and cultural funding program criteria, and the administration of funding, can neither sustain nor continue to be the source of language and cultural revitaliza-

tion, or be the eligibility for language support, for our communities. Change is needed.

We know that much work is still required to fully implement the act. The implementation must ensure that first nation grassroots communities and well-established first nation organizations, who have immense expertise and lived experience in language protection and revitalization, must be included in every stage of implementation and operations, including the development of policies and funding models. The implementation of the act and/or distribution of funding cannot be delegated to political organizations. Grassroots communities and grassroots organizations are the language-holders, the language speakers and the language champions. We are the frontline workers. We are the present. We are the past. We certainly are the future.

We appreciate the working relationship with the staff at Canadian Heritage, who recognize the diverse expertise of the First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres. They value the community language experts who assist in the government's work on indigenous languages.

The act, including its spirit and intent, must be fully and diligently recognized in the implementation for the protection and revitalization of first nation languages. The beneficiaries are our children, today and seven generations beyond. Much work remains to be done. FNCCEC's wide array of expertise in language development, implementation, research, and program and technical support must be integral to all aspects of the implementation of the Indigenous Languages Act.

Let's work together to make this happen for our children and our youth today, and for seven generations.

Chi miigwetch. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Commanda.

We'll now go to Dr. Lewis for opening remarks.

Dr. Kevin Lewis (Assistant Professor, University of Saskatchewan, Kâniyâsihk Culture Camps, As an Individual): [*Witness spoke in Plains Cree, interpreted as follows:*]

I would like to thank the Creator for allowing us to come and present on Parliament Hill.

I would like to thank you for the invitation.

I would like to thank the Creator for giving us this language and how much we love our language. We have a lot of people who have lost the language. We have a lot of people who don't know where they came from, especially the creation story, even the Dene, Nakawe and the Nakota people. Those are the creation stories that a lot of our people in our communities have no knowledge of where they come from. It is our elders who are wanting us, urging us, to teach our songs and our creation stories. We have creation stories that include the ice age. We also have the creation story of where we come from, where the mountains are spiritual, and even the fire, the wind and the flood. All those stories, they come from the island, from Turtle Island.

Those are the ones the elders wanted us to teach in our schools to retain those languages, even those stories that come from climate change. We don't know what the future holds in terms of climate change. We ask the elders, "How do we retain the language in terms of climate change?" We are taking the opportunity to take our kids outside in terms of a language base. What we are seeing when we look at the sun and when it rains.... We have never seen any rain in January, and now we are running to the elders. The elders are saying, "Do not be afraid. Go back to our ceremonies. Go back to our language. Go back to our creation stories. Those are the ones that are going to help us in the future. Let's go back to the creation stories."

The other thing we have to look at and focus on is Treaty No. 6 and our treaties. We come from Treaty No. 6 territory. To our relative, I would like to welcome her for allowing us to visit her. She is one of our relations who is coming to invite us....

On the work that we are doing, we have forgotten our language. We have forgotten our promises. For all the teachings, we are going back. We know that in the past our spiritual ones and our visionaries were the ones who came and prophesied that they knew that our brothers were going to come, that they were coming to our country. They were coming to our Turtle Island. They were all going to come here. They knew that they were going to work together. They told us. They advised us. They asked us to work together. We have to work together but never forget where we came from, never forget our languages and never give up our ceremonies.

This is what I wanted to tell you: Work closely together. In the past, our elders used the pipe. The pipe was always in the forefront. The pipe is the most ceremonial item that was used in terms of languages, in terms of protecting languages, and where we are trying to run, we seek the advice of our elders, our knowledge keepers.

• (1745)

A lot of them we have not seen. They're in the spirit world now. The ones we sat with in the past loved the language. They advised us, "Teach your young. Teach your elders how to use the pipe. This will keep them in the spiritual world."

I want to talk a bit about myself. I've worked at the University of Blue Quills, the University of Saskatchewan, the University of Alberta, the University of Victoria and the WHEAT Institute. These are the different institutions that I have worked with. These are the institutions, the universities, that are reaching out to us. They are running to us.

We have in our own community a lot of elders. We seek and sought the elders. This is where we have a lot of our spiritual leaders and knowledge keepers. We seek their knowledge. They're the ones we rely on.

We sat with Marc Miller today. We presented our language and the importance of retaining our language, and that we really need to work together. In order for us to retain the language, we have to work together.

There's one other thing. I would like to thank Canadian Heritage for all the effort and all the work it's put into the development of the

languages act. I would like to thank it. It has helped us in the past, and it will continue to help us in the future.

This is all I wanted to say for now, but I will want to talk about all we do in terms of languages in my own community.

• (1750)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Lewis. I was waiting a bit, because it's translated to English and then it has to be translated into French, so it takes a little while. Thank you very much for your testimony.

We'll now go to Dr. Lorna Williams. If you are ready, you have the microphone to make your opening remarks.

Go ahead, please.

Dr. Lorna Williams (Chair, First Peoples' Cultural Foundation): *[Witness spoke in the Lil'wat language]*

[English]

Lorna Williams is my English name. Wánosts'a7 is the name that my people call me. I come from the land of the Lil'watul, in a place called Mount Currie in British Columbia. I taught at the University of Victoria and retired from there.

I am the current chair of the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation. I'm the past chair of the First Peoples' Cultural Council. These are organizations that work on revitalizing, recovering and maintaining the indigenous languages in British Columbia.

My work with our languages began when I lost my language at residential school. I attended the St. Joseph's Mission in Williams Lake and had to relearn my language. It was fortunate for me that the language in my family was strong, and that I lived in the old part of our village where the old people had never been to English school. I was able to recover and to recover my language. I learned English while I was in the hospital.

As a child, I came to see the challenges and the beauty of language and communication. I feel that's where I began my education.

In 1971, 1972 and 1973, my village of Mount Currie was the first community in B.C. to take over its own education. This was a change in government. One of the things that our community said was that they could see that our language was beginning to shift. More and more people were speaking English than our language, which was really different, and they said, "We have to stop this."

One of the challenges they gave us was to figure out how to keep our language thriving. This was in the early seventies.

I'm sharing this with you so that you know what my background is. I've been involved with K-to-12 education, both at the band-controlled school level and at the public school level. I was a consultant for the Vancouver School District for 15 years. There, I saw children from across Canada in Vancouver. They were children who no longer had a connection to their homelands. A few did, but many didn't. I saw the challenges there that need to be overcome to help us follow our right to our languages. I then went to work for the Ministry of Education in B.C., and then to the University of Victoria, where I finished my employment career.

In 2019, I was present at the UN when it became the International Year of Indigenous Languages. There was so much hope and positive talk about indigenous languages around the world. In 2019, I was so pleased that, finally, the country of Canada was acknowledging and recognizing that our languages exist, and putting into place a process of our being able to work together to do something, finally, in a legitimate way for our languages.

• (1755)

The challenge is a big one for Canada, which has two official languages, both colonizing languages that continue to colonize our people, not just here in Canada but in many places around the world. One of the challenges for the government to make something of this act is to determine whether it has the courage, the audacity and the zeal to look at itself honestly and to look at how all of the policies, the practices and the habits that have become entwined and entrenched to protect English and French keep indigenous languages down. You have to be brave to look at what those practices are, at what those policies are, because they have to be addressed to shift and to change what we have become so habituated to in this country.

We also need to be able to look at the impositions of the Indian Act and be brave enough to change it. What has it done? It has divided us, making some status and making some non-status. It's dislocated, dislodged and relocated people, indigenous people. This act has to be able to serve all indigenous people. That's what you set out to do. It's important then for us to know what it is and what the challenges are that we face. For example, today there are children who have half-status. There are children who have quarter-status. Do they have a right to their language? Will they be served under this act? That's what you have to be able to look at.

We need to be able to look at the infrastructures that are supposed to serve the revitalization, the recovery, the maintenance and the sustaining of languages. I want to speak here about education, because the institution of education has been the instrument that has been used to destroy, to annihilate, our languages and our people. We also need to know that education is a powerful institution and that it can serve to support the work that we need to do, but it can only do that if we're brave enough to redesign it, to question it and to learn from indigenous people who've devoted their lives to trying to strengthen this.

For example, we need indigenous language teachers in schools. There's a demand for them. Schools have used fluent speakers, our elders in our communities. They've never been recognized, acknowledged as teachers, but they do the work. They have figured out how to do it with no post-secondary training.

• (1800)

There is not one single teacher education program in Canada where indigenous language teachers can get the education they need, the learning they need, to do this challenging task, to get a credential and to be recognized and paid as teachers.

Right now, Mr. Garneau, across this country there are many teachers of indigenous languages, and they're paid a pittance because they're not recognized as teachers. That's why I say that we have to look at much of the infrastructure that's in place and make the changes that are needed.

We have some opportunities currently that I want to highlight. One is that the Province of Ontario a few years ago put into place the possibility for indigenous institutions to be degree-granting. That is a huge step. It's a positive step. It could be a very important contributing force to making this Indigenous Languages Act work. We have in British Columbia many years of experience in working with every first nations language—34 languages and their dialects. This is complicated work. It requires lots of support from communities, partnerships and collaborations, but it also counts on the kind of research that needs to be done and that right now does not exist. We have some examples.

It's important, then, to look at yourself in government, at how you stop the work, but also look at what people have been doing across this country to keep our languages alive. When you think about all the things that have happened and that have tried to silence us, our languages continue. They continue because of the passion and the commitment you heard from the former speaker, who talked about the commitment from our elders, our knowledge keepers, to protect our languages of the land. We need to be able to use that, learn from it, go forward and work together.

Thank you.

• (1805)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Williams. We extended the opening remarks a little bit longer than normal, because you had some very important things to say.

We will proceed now with one round.

We'll start with Mr. Vidal for six minutes.

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

I want to thank all our witnesses for being here today and for sharing with us their knowledge, experience and wisdom as we debate this important topic.

I'll focus my questions on Dr. Lewis for now, simply because some of the great work that he does is within about 45 minutes of where I live.

I do want to talk about the work you do there, but before I do that, I want to give a little shout-out to your mom for being here and translating for us today. It's really cool to have her here and doing that for us.

Voices: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gary Vidal: Dr. Lewis, I know about some of the things you've done on your journey, specifically around the kâniyâsihk Culture Camps that you run out at Island Lake. You've also developed an indigenous languages certificate through the University of Saskatchewan.

I'll give you my time to talk about those two things, but I would love for you to include in your explanation of the great work that you do there some of the best practices and some of the things that everybody can learn from your knowledge and success through those two processes, which we can then share in our study of the languages act.

Dr. Kevin Lewis: [*Witness spoke in Plains Cree, interpreted as follows:*]

In 2015, when we first started our not-for-profit and in the beginning when we first started kâniyâsihk Culture Camps, we did not have these knowledge keepers, the helpers for our ceremonies. Here, we have kids who are hunting, trapping and fishing—feeding the elders, feeding the community, feeding the schools and the ceremonial holders. This is what kâniyâsihk originated from.

In the beginning, I asked my grandma, and these are the words from my grandma: “Do not exclude the young girls who are wanting to learn. The youth are crying out. They want the youth to come in and teach themselves and they want the elders to come and teach them the teachings from the land.” Then my kokum said, “At that point of that lake is where in the winter they used to settle the nets.” Yes, everything happens at kâniyâsihk Culture Camps. This is where elders used to teach kids to pick berries.

We have been wanting to create our own curriculum in the native way by bringing in the elders and bringing in the creation stories. We have to learn. We have to teach these kids how to hunt and how to trap.

In 2019 there's a little bit of money that's there. This is going to happen now. We call that the centre of excellence. That is our school. Here, we are teaching kids to teach the language. We bring in our elders. The elders are at the forefront of the teachers. Then we have the young girls who are coming in. We have the female elders who come and raise the pipes there. Then we have the youth meals. They come and they are taught how to lift the pipe. These are the teepee teachings.

Here, we also include the sweat lodge and the horse dance. We also include the owl dance. We also include the sun dance. We have the sweat lodges. There is so much to carry, and there is so much that we have to do. The elders are instructing us. They say to take the kids out on the land. That's where the teachings are. This is where our kinship comes from and our relationships with the land and with the sun. We address it as “Grandfather Sun”. Then there are the eagles and the thunder. The thunderbirds give us the rain and the snow. They do all the work for us, these grandfathers. We

address the wind as our grandfather. This is where we address kinship. Everyone is interrelated, be it on land, water or air, and we, as humans, are all related. We are all interrelated. These are the teachings from the elders. Even for the four-legged, we are related to them. For the water, we are related to the water beings.

This is our curriculum. It is just like our language. We are visiting, we love each other and we know each other. It's all because we go back to the relations, the relationships, and we respect our kinship. We respect everyone we are related to. This is how we look and this is how we respect the language. That is why we are working really hard for our languages. That's the reason we are so wealthy in terms of languages. We are rich in our languages across Turtle Island. We are very rich.

• (1810)

We have our relations in the four directions of our people. These creation stories that we hear come from four directions, and this is what we offer the Creator. We give thanks to the Creator in terms of our relations coming from four directions, the four colours of man and the four colours of print.

It is a very honourable thing when you take a child out on the land. Land-based teachings are where we want our kids to be in terms of languages. It is the teachings of the elders. It is the direction from the elders in our school system that we take the kids out on the land, especially in the winter and in the summer as well.

Especially in the summer, when we take the kids out on the land, this is where we harvest our plants. This is where we harvest our ceremonial plants and berries. This is where the elders come together with the youth and the children in the summer, when we have our schools in the summer where we have our elders and we have our youth. We enjoy seeing the elders coming out on the land with the youth and with the children, where they are helping and teaching each other about the land, about the berries, about the trees and about the wildlife.

We have seen high suicide rates. It's because they've lost their identity, but now we have to go out and we have to help each other. We have to bring our youth onto and introduce them to the land. This is the good life. *Miyo-pimâtisiwin* is what we call it in Cree. This is what kâniyâsihk Culture Camps are all about. We put all of our effort into maintaining that school. In terms of operation costs, we have no funding at all while we're working on our curriculum and trying to bring education.

• (1815)

[*English*]

We went to Maui. We went to the Hawaiians. They have the tourism industry over there. They're employing their indigenous people, who went through these types of systems. We did the research. We went there and we visited them. In the tourism industry, we know how to keep things sacred, and we know the flashy stuff that we can sell to the world. Destination Canada approached us, saying, “Why don't you talk on our behalf and bring the world to Canada?”

When I was over in China, when I was in Europe and when I was in Australia and New Zealand, they wanted to know about the aboriginal people here. What's going on over there? How are they? They want authentic experiences of Canada. They love and want to hear our stories.

In the time of reconciliation, this is the time when I think we need to flourish. We need to show them the boat skills. We need to show them the math, the architecture and the engineering that goes into making a birchbark canoe. We need to show them the food that we have here. They want to taste that.

I said in my opening statement that I thank Canadian Heritage for saying, "We'll take this on," but we need movement because the elders are passing. There is a really big urgency here, and when we take care of that urgency, when the funding flows a little faster, it's going to benefit our people. It's going to benefit our riding, our province and ultimately Canada.

[Witness speaks in Plains Cree]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Lewis. It is very fascinating to hear you describe that training, the education you provide.

Mr. Weiler, you have six minutes.

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm very grateful to our witnesses for being here today in person and joining virtually to share their wisdom. It is such a privilege to hear so many indigenous languages today already.

The first question I'd like to ask is for Dr. Williams. You were very instrumental in setting up one of, if not the first, band-run school in the country. Then just last year the Lilwat Nation signed an agreement with the federal government to have full control over how education is delivered for the nation, including control over curriculum, teacher certifications and graduation requirements.

I was hoping you could share with our committee here the importance of this path in being able to sustain and revitalize the language of the Lilwat Nation and what other nations—such as the Squamish Nation, in my riding, which is very interested in this—can learn from this process and what we as a committee can learn as we look at the future of the Indigenous Languages Act.

● (1820)

Dr. Lorna Williams: This is a major step on the path. As I said, in my community we've been working on this since the early seventies. One thing that is so critical is that we need to be able to regenerate the language in every aspect of life in our community. School is one of them. School, because it's so important, is key. For example, one thing that happens in that school is that children spend time on the land. This is really important. In our case, language learning has to be a reconnection to our relationships, a reconnection to the land and to everything that's on the land. It has to assert that it's a caring and kind relationship. That's really important.

Part of it, then, is that the message has to be that it isn't just learning a language; it's also learning the world view and the cultural ways of the people. It's a relationship with the land. It's a relationship with the ancestors. It's a relationship with the people who are coming. It's a relationship with all areas of the community. That

view of education is very different from the western world's view. The western world separates children from their families and from multigenerations. It separates children from the land. It's really important for schools to be able to graduate people based on their cultural world view.

My community has always said, from the very beginning, that it's also important for us to know that we need to exist in multiple worlds. One thing we need to be able to do is to cross the boundaries of those different worlds, and to be able to do it without losing our sense of self. Knowing your language and knowing the intricacies and the beauty of your world will help you to do that and to have a positive experience, one where you're able to live in and engage with multiple worlds, not the destructive one that we've experienced.

That's what communities like mine have to rebuild and re-establish. It can be a very frightening experience. Everybody has said that education has to look like the English way. Everybody has said that the strength of a person is how well they speak the English and French languages. One of the challenges we face is for us to be able to see the strength and beauty of our own languages, and for the outside world to be able to appreciate and see that. To hear the languages at this table is really critical. Canada needs to step that up a bit so that Canadians can feel and value indigenous languages.

Thank you.

● (1825)

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weiler.

[Translation]

Ms. Gill, you have six minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Chair, I no longer have any questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Alright.

Ms. Idlout, you have the floor for six minutes.

[English]

Ms. Lori Idlout: *[Member spoke in Inuktitut]*

[English]

I want to thank all of the witnesses. Normally I'm able to speak in Inuktitut during these sessions. I've very much welcomed having my space, my interpreter, replaced by a Cree interpreter so that we can hear you speaking your language. I've very much enjoyed hearing what you've had to share.

I also thank you, Claudette Commanda, for welcoming us to your territory.

To you as well, Dr. Williams, thank you so much for your testimony.

I'll just ask one question. Could I ask each of you to respond to my one question?

What I'm finding is missing in the Indigenous Languages Act is that nowhere does it talk about the importance of healing. It does provide a bit in the preamble, and in later parts of the act it acknowledges what Canada has done. It acknowledges that reconciliation is important, but nowhere in the act does it talk about the importance of healing and how relearning indigenous languages can be a form of this healing that helps to make sure that we have a better sense of self to improve our sense of identity as indigenous peoples.

I wondered if you had thoughts on whether it would be important to incorporate an amendment into the Indigenous Languages Act about the importance of healing.

Qujannamiik.

Ms. Claudette Commanda: If I may respond, thank you for that question. I wholeheartedly understand why you asked that question, and I'd say yes: Healing is one of the most fundamental elements. Each and every day, we heal. It's everyday lifelong learning.

When we look at the past, this colonial past and all these lived experiences that our people have endured, healing is so much needed. It is so much needed, and it is our languages and our culture that bring forth that healing—absolutely. We don't separate language and culture. We cannot separate our languages from our culture, and from our culture to our identity. We cannot separate it. It's all part and parcel of who we are as Anishinabe people or who we are as first peoples of the land.

In every experience that we have in our lives, our ways of knowing, our ways of being, are so important. We know that our people need to heal, especially our children. Definitely, the act must provide for and must support healing—absolutely. Without language, there will be no healing. Without healing, there will be no self-esteem. There will be no.... Even for that world view and the understandings and traditional knowledge, or even for those practices or just the connection to the land, it is so important. I think about that word we have in the Anishinabe Algonquin language, when we say, I am the land and the land is me. That is where I find my source of healing and strength.

I definitely agree that healing has to be part and parcel of it. It's integral. It's connected. We cannot separate it. With languages come every aspect of our lives. We've heard it eloquently expressed by both speakers: Dr. Williams and Dr. Lewis. It speaks about who we are, our creation and our connection. Without healing, how can we reconnect? We have to restore, revitalize and reclaim every aspect of our being. Healing is so important, absolutely.

Chi miigwetch for that question.

• (1830)

The Chair: Dr. Lewis, would you like to comment? We'll then go to Dr. Williams.

Dr. Kevin Lewis: [*Witness spoke in Plains Cree, interpreted as follows:*]

I would like to commend you for asking these questions. I thank you so much from the bottom of my heart.

If you look at mental health, that's the mind. How do we heal our minds? There are two things that we're looking at. When we look at the Maori, they call neurodiversity *tānisi étikwē*. There is no term in our languages. We don't have it, but this terminology says we have to ask—we have to resort to our elders—how do we heal ourselves? If a person is not mentally or physically...when you look at the four quadrants, this is when we run to the elders in terms of healing.

When we went to Auckland four years ago, we went to listen to their languages. We went to do our research. We had the researchers, professors, directors and all of them, whoever was involved in all those universities in Auckland, and every one of us, every one of them, was looking at the mental health aspect. How do you heal your people mentally and physically? How do you approach the elders? How do you do that? Even the Hawaiians were looking at us. They were asking the same questions.

It's us, but it's us with the first nations elders and how we are sitting here together and how we are looking at this legislation, the Indigenous Languages Act. This is how, if we start gathering and having these types of engagements, we will lift our language and this is how we will lift ourselves.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Lewis.

Go ahead, Dr. Williams.

Dr. Lorna Williams: Thank you very much.

Thank you so much for that question, Lori. That's a really important one.

When we design and deliver language programs to children in the schools and in the communities—especially in the communities—when it's delivered in a way that's respectful to and full of integrity for the indigenous world and people are learning, in that way, healing takes place. We don't have to separate it. That's what takes place.

I really appreciate your question, because we have many people who are adults, particularly, who are relearning their languages or who are learning their languages, and it's a painful process. In those cases, we need to be able to deliver a program that acknowledges and recognizes that. It's healing that has to take place, not just with an individual but with a family and a community.

I did programs, for example, for people whom we call “silent speakers”. These are usually adults who speak the language and who learned their language as children, but because of their school experiences and other experiences, stopped using their language. We need to create programs and strategies that work with these people, because it's a very painful process to regenerate that language, and we need to be able to focus on that. We're not. We're not usually delivering programs for that population, and that's a huge population in our communities that we're not looking at.

Oftentimes, in our indigenous world, we don't separate the institutions, for example, of learning and health, but in the western world, that's what we do. Again, it's looking at all of the infrastructure that is in place and seeing the kinds of changes that need to be made to support the work that we need to do to reclaim, recover, revitalize and sustain our languages.

Thank you.

• (1835)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to our guests this evening for their testimony and their answers to our questions. They have touched us with their knowledge on the subject that we are studying. We are very grateful to them to have taken the time to answer our questions. I know that their testimony will prove very useful during our study on indigenous languages, a subject that is extremely important and warrants a lot of attention. Again, our heartfelt thanks.

The meeting is adjourned.

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