



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

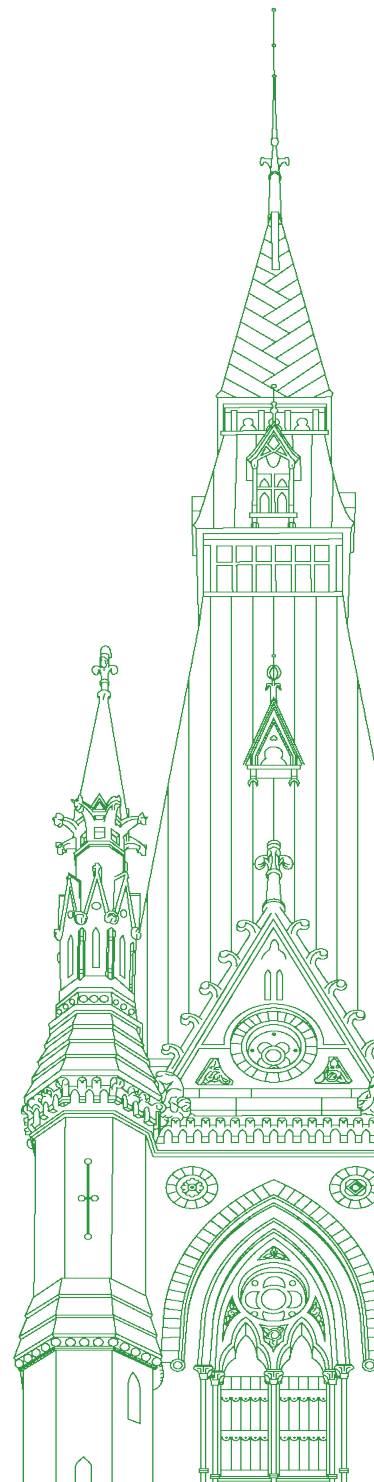
EVIDENCE

NUMBER 039

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Thursday, September 24, 2026

Chair: Terry Sheehan



Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

Thursday, September 24, 2026

• (0815)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes, CPC)): Good morning. I call this meeting to order.

I'm the new and improved Terry Sheehan for the time being.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): This is meeting number 39. I hope everyone had a great summer. It's good to see everyone back. Everyone's smiling and we are ready to continue our study of affordability challenges in northern Canada.

Everyone here knows the rules on how to use the microphone and that kind of thing.

I'll remind our witnesses, especially those online, that I'll acknowledge you and then you can take it from there. If you're on Zoom, don't forget there's a language button at the bottom of your screen. You can select English or French. For those in the room, of course, you have your earpieces.

Everyone knows the rest. There are about two pages here, but I think we're good to go.

All right. I guess we'll start in person, since Mikey's across from me.

Do you want to kick it off for five minutes?

Mikey McBryan (General Manager, Buffalo Airways Ltd.): Yes, I could do that.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): You're the first witness of this sitting.

Mikey McBryan: Thanks for having me.

Good morning, Chair, and members of the committee. My name is Mikey McBryan. I'm the general manager of Buffalo Airways in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories.

My father, Joe McBryan, was born in Yellowknife. He's Métis, and Buffalo Airways is 100% aboriginal-owned. He started Buffalo in 1970, so for 56 years we've been moving people, freight and supplies across the north. His history shows what can happen when a northerner gets the opportunity to build in the north, creating jobs, training and reinvesting in the place he came from.

The main point I want to make today is simple: Affordability in the north is not only about what things cost. It's about who controls the northern dollar and where that dollar goes.

Almost everything we use has transportation built into it. Groceries, lumber, hockey sticks and aircraft parts from all over the world have to travel a long way to get to the north. Transportation runs on fuel. Fuel is Buffalo's biggest expense. When policy makes fuel more expensive through taxes, fees and regulation, the cost does not stop with the airline. It moves into freight, groceries, construction and, ultimately, the cost of living.

Someone living downtown here in Ottawa may have lots of transportation choices, but in many northern communities, there's no other option. Airplanes still have to fly, trucks still have to move and groceries still have to arrive. Northern realities have to be considered before policies are designed to increase the price of energy.

I also have to question the idea of collecting more money and then returning it through rebates in government programs. Even when revenues return, it's not the same as leaving the decision with northerners in the first place. Once the money leaves your pockets, someone else decides how it comes back and what it should support.

The north does not grow through greater dependency on programs designed to compensate for the higher costs. It grows through sustainable, independent economic growth: northern businesses, northern workers, northern investment and northerners deciding what northerners need. Not every Buffalo employee lives permanently in the north. We have people who rotate in, but we prioritize hiring local because we want to build northern careers, not simply fill jobs in the north.

The same principle should apply to government spending. The lowest invoice is not always the whole economic story. We should ask how much of the money remains in the north and what capacity it leaves behind. The question becomes even more important when we look at natural resources.

Before there was a highway, before there was a runway and before there was a modern mine, people were already living in the north. Indigenous people have lived on these lands since time immemorial. Modern infrastructure did not make the north a home; it was already home. My own family has been connected to northern mining for generations. My great-grandfather was in Yellowknife looking for gold more than a century ago. I'm now the fourth generation of a northern mining family, so I'm not opposed to development. Resource development is part of my family's history, but roads, airports and transportation corridors not only give northerners access to the rest of Canada. They give Canada and the world access to the north.

For generations, the north has been one of the world's great piggy banks of resources. Today, the world is again looking north for the resources needed for the next generation of technology and industry.

The world may need what is beneath the northern ground, but need does not mean entitlement. There is power in having something the world needs, and the power is deciding how, when and whether it is developed. When development happens, the question should be this: What does it leave behind? It's northern businesses, northern infrastructure, northern careers and northern wealth. The north should not simply be a place where wealth is extracted and carried away. It should be a place where wealth is built.

If there's one thing I would ask the committee to do, it's to follow the dollar. When the fuel costs rise, when government buys northern transportation and when the northern resources are developed, where does that dollar go? The long-term answer to northern affordability is not simply finding new ways to send money north. It is creating an economy where more northern money has a reason to stay in the north in the first place.

Thank you for inviting me. I'm happy to answer your questions.

Was that under five minutes?

● (0820)

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Wow. You have 43 seconds remaining. Well done. I wish Air Canada was more like your airline—coming in early.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): That was a great way to start.

We will now go online. I guess we'll choose the one with the best background, so we'll go with Dr. Julia Christensen, associate professor of geography and planning at Queen's University.

You have five minutes.

Julia Christensen (Associate Professor, Geography and Planning, Queen's University, As an Individual): Thank you so much.

Good morning, everyone. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to participate as a witness in your study of affordability challenges in northern Canada.

I'm an associate professor in geography and planning at Queen's University. I'm also project director of a pan-northern housing re-

search partnership called "At Home in the North". Funded through the collaborative housing research network, our partnership brings together indigenous and public governments, NGOs and community-led organizations from across the territorial and provincial norths with northern housing researchers and advocates, all working towards northern-led, sustainable housing solutions.

My research, teaching and advocacy over the whole of my career has focused on northern and indigenous housing and home. Housing and home lie at the cornerstone of northern well-being. By limiting our understanding of home to the material structures and market-oriented policy frameworks, we see the biggest obstacles to northern affordability manifest themselves persistently over time. Without a sustainable, robust and self-determined northern housing ecosystem, challenges to the affordability of northern life perpetuate and contribute to the diminishing social determinants of northern and indigenous health, well-being and prosperity.

Since the first federal northern housing programs were introduced across the territorial norths in the mid-20th century, a northern housing crisis has ensued. That is to say that the present-day northern housing crisis is not a recent phenomenon. Rather, it's a reality that northerners have lived for decades, driven by design and administrative approaches to northern housing that are ill-suited to northern cultures and contexts as well as the chronic underfunding that has characterized northern housing policy since its inception.

Remoteness was in effect manufactured by settlement policy of the day. Northern settlements and their functions were situated at far range from southern-based planning and design, administration, building materials and labour. In recent years, the negative impact that such remoteness has on northern affordability has been made even clearer through the effects of climate change. Wildfires and wildfire evacuations, for example, have shown that it's not only housing infrastructure that's threatened by a warming climate, but it's the entire northern housing ecosystem. Fragile northern housing industry is undermined by highway closures, barge cancellations due to low water levels or unpredictable sea ice patterns, the evacuation of major hubs like Yellowknife during a very narrow construction season, and the destruction of modular housing units and other building supplies held in storage in communities overcome by wildfire.

Most communities across the territorial north are considered non-market, meaning the majority of housing is public or staff housing. Little housing can be bought or sold, yet the housing continuum long promoted by CMHC is market-based and situates home ownership as the end goal of the continuum and the ultimate realization of the Canadian dream. This ideology continues to underpin northern housing policy, despite the reality that home ownership is unattainable and in many cases undesirable, at least in its conventional application, across many northern communities. That's certainly what we've heard through the work of At Home in the North. Even in communities where territorial governments are providing mortgages through home ownership programs, the cost of heating and repair makes home ownership unaffordable. As a result, default rates are high.

Addressing northern affordability challenges requires addressing the failures of the northern housing system. Northern housing is at the foundation of northern well-being and must be at the foundation of northern economies. For too long, we have viewed the north as a frontier for resource extraction, which has led to boom-bust cycles and steep income and geographical inequalities that have driven northern affordability challenges. There are no boom-bust cycles when it comes to housing.

We need housing. We need new builds. We need labour to repair and maintain existing stock. We need building and maintenance supplies that are readily accessible to northerners. We need housing design and technology built for the north. We need northern labour trained in construction, inspection, maintenance and repair. We need housing governance and administration that comes from the north, and in particular from indigenous communities and other community-based housing providers who know best the needs, priorities and innovations of northern peoples. We need a northern housing economy that is, to the fullest extent possible, based in the north, not one that continues to rely entirely on supply chains and labour markets that are far from the communities they are intended to serve.

Thank you so much for this opportunity.

● (0825)

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much, Dr. Christensen, with 18 seconds left. This is a good start to the session. This is great.

Let's go to Shannon Joseph, chair of Energy for a Secure Future. You have five minutes.

Shannon Joseph (Chair, Energy For A Secure Future): Thank you, Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Shannon Joseph. I lead Energy for a Secure Future, a non-partisan initiative that brings together labour, business, and indigenous and municipal leaders and organizations to advance Canada's energy future.

In collaboration with the First Nations Power Authority, we conducted research on energy affordability in rural communities and first nations reserves. The resulting report, called "The Other Energy Security: Addressing Energy Poverty in Canada's Indigenous Communities", identifies a critical issue, which is that while Canada has some of the most affordable natural gas in the world,

many first nations and rural communities heat their homes with far more expensive and higher-emitting fuels for lack of natural gas access. This situation is a driver of energy poverty and a barrier to social and economic progress in many communities.

In 2021, Statistics Canada found that 5.6% of Canadian households were energy-poor. On reserve, the figure was more than double that, at 12.9%. A 2025 Earncliffe survey found that over a third of indigenous respondents fit the definition of "energy poor", spending more than 10% of their after-tax income on energy. Among respondents, roughly 29% had reduced their energy use to save money and 32% had reduced their spending on essentials to afford energy.

Chief Christine Longjohn of Sturgeon Lake First Nation in Saskatchewan calls this "heat poverty"—families choosing between groceries and a warm home. In some communities reliant on electricity or propane, heating bills approach or exceed \$1,000 a month.

Natural gas is the cheapest way to heat a home in Canada. Canada Energy Regulator data from 2022 states that electricity costs roughly two to six times more per gigajoule than natural gas, depending on the province. In the five provinces where we found data, over 300 first nations reserves have no natural gas connection, even when surrounded by natural gas infrastructure. This leaves many of these communities with higher energy bills, acting as a barrier to their economic and social development objectives.

Two barriers keep communities stuck.

The first is provincial. Provincial regulators generally require a utility to recover the cost of infrastructure extensions from the customers it connects to. Even when a community energy project can cover 80% to 90% of its costs, the project can still fail to move forward because the remaining costs cannot be absorbed under the provincial regulatory model.

The second barrier is federal. Many federal programs have excluded projects focused on natural gas distribution. Therefore, even when communities have determined it is their best option to move away from propane, heating oil or diesel, federal funding for community energy has often failed to enable the switch.

Ultimately, many rural and indigenous communities find themselves in a gap between federal resources and provincial regulation.

However, this is fixable, and governments have done it before. In Red Lake, Ontario, \$2.7 million in federal support helped that community to access natural gas, saving residential customers 50% to 70% on their heating costs. Ontario's expansion program, funded by a one-dollar monthly charge on existing customers, has connected dozens of communities, including first nations.

More projects are ready. The First Nations Power Authority is advancing a \$39.2-million project to bring natural gas to five Saskatchewan first nations. Households would save an average of \$1,568 a year, which is about \$2.1 million annually across the five of them. The Canadian Gas Association has identified roughly \$1.1 billion in similar projects nationally, where the communities are known and the routes are understood.

Therefore, we offer three recommendations.

First, make natural gas distribution extensions eligible under existing federal programs, such as the indigenous community infrastructure fund and the clean energy for rural and remote communities program, or create a dedicated program to support natural gas access in rural and indigenous communities.

Second, provide resources that enhance community energy resilience, including appliance upgrades, community energy audits, local capacity and better housing quality on reserves.

Third, build rural and indigenous energy access into the federal agenda around major projects as pipelines or data centres are built, and leverage tools like the indigenous loan guarantee so that nations near national infrastructure can benefit directly from it.

Above all, this must be the community's choice. Not every northern community or first nation will want natural gas, but when a community does, federal policy should not take away that option.

• (0830)

Guy Lonechild, CEO of the First Nations Power Authority, put it simply: "Natural gas is the new water." Clean water on reserve is finally getting attention. Affordable, reliable heat should be next.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Next up on the list is Lorne Browne, director with the Department of Infrastructure in the Government of Northwest Territories.

Mr. Browne, you have five minutes.

Lorne Browne (Director, Department of Infrastructure (Fuel Services Division), Government of Northwest Territories): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Lorne Browne. I represent the Government of the Northwest Territories' fuel services division. A few speakers mentioned fuel in their addresses, and I'll talk about fuel a lot more.

The fuel services division's mandate is to purchase, transport, store and sell diesel, gasoline and, in some cases, jet fuel in 16 remote and difficult-to-access communities in the Northwest Territories. These are communities where the private sector does not oper-

ate, so the government steps in to provide those services. We also deliver diesel fuel to 20 communities in the NWT for electricity generation as a primary or backup source. The service we provide does not take any profit. It seeks only to break even and provide the service to our residents.

In most of the communities serviced, an entire year's supply of fuel is delivered in just a few weeks by tug-and-barge operation on our waterways or by tanker truck on our seasonal and winter roads. Due to the extremely remote locations of some of our communities and the cost of shipping, fuel costs in the NWT are some of the highest in Canada. We typically change fuel pricing after annual resupply, so generally speaking, fuel prices are set for the year.

The governments of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut are the only two jurisdictions in Canada to manage fuel for public use on this scale.

Since 2020, fuel prices in the communities we service have escalated quickly and considerably. On average, fuel prices have increased by as much as 50% as of last winter. Market volatility since March 2026 suggests additional and significant increases are forthcoming in many communities in the next price change cycle. Not only is it more expensive to purchase fuel on the wholesale market, but transportation costs have also escalated because, of course, transporting fuel uses fuel.

Climate-related disruptions have negatively affected the supply chains as well and exacerbated fuel costs. Events such as wildfires, increased sea ice and low river water events make it difficult to deliver fuel, risking inventory levels and forcing millions of litres of fuel to be delivered by alternative means, including sometimes by air tanker. For perspective, delivery of fuel by tanker truck or tug-and-barge operation can typically run between 50¢ and 70¢ a litre to some of our communities. By comparison, delivery by air tanker can cost upwards of five dollars per litre. That's just the transportation cost. Other cost components, of course, make up the final selling price.

The Northwest Territories has experienced several intense wild-fire seasons over the last three years. One of those fires destroyed a key rail link, which impacts bulk delivery of petroleum products from the south. Now tanker trucks must be used to deliver on that part of the route. Low water events in the Mackenzie River, our main water-based transportation route, have also impacted barge operations, forcing costly supply chain rerouting.

All these supply chain impediments and resulting contingencies come at a cost.

It's important to acknowledge that high fuel costs trickle down to influence the cost of most aspects of modern living. Few things in our lives affect the cost of living like fuel does, especially in the north: the manufacture and transportation of goods, generation of electricity, heating of homes, growing and transporting food, construction activities, resource sector activities, infrastructure maintenance and operating costs, personal travel costs and even traditional activities such as fishing and hunting for food. All these activities are linked to the cost of fuel.

Since fuel is a globally traded commodity, residents of Canada's north have little to no influence on its pricing. At the same time, there is no single driver more impactful to the cost of living than the price of fuel. Some progress is being made on reducing our reliance on liquid petroleum products; however, at least for the foreseeable future, we'll continue to feel the impacts of high fuel costs and the resulting high costs of living in the north.

Thank you.

● (0835)

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much, Mr. Browne.

Next up, we have the Pembina Institute.

Lynne Couves, you're up for five minutes.

Lynne Couves (Director, Renewables in Remote Communities, Pembina Institute, Pembina Institute): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, committee. Thanks for having me.

My name is Lynne Couves. I am the director of the renewables in remote communities program at the Pembina Institute, which is a national non-partisan clean energy think tank. I join you today from the lands that raised me and the lands that are now raising my children, in Treaty No. 7 territory, in Mohkinstsis, also called Calgary.

For more than 30 years the Pembina Institute has studied clean energy systems in remote and northern communities across Canada. Over that time we have seen the consequences of what is often called Canada's infrastructure gap, which is decades of underinvestment that have left remote and northern communities without infrastructure that most Canadians take for granted, including all-season roads, modern electricity systems and reliable high-speed Internet. I'll focus today on one part of that gap, which is energy.

First off, energy reliability in the north is an affordability issue. More than 210 remote communities across Canada produce their electricity independently from the North American electricity grid. Most also rely heavily on imported fossil fuels for heating and for

electricity, which means that when local infrastructure fails or fuel cannot reach a community, there are very few energy alternatives. At the same time, much of the infrastructure people depend on is aging and increasingly strained. The consequences of this can be profound, including power outages, fuel shortages, rapidly rising costs and, in severe circumstances, threats to the safety of entire communities, which require evacuation.

The second point I'd like to make is that the cost of this system is already extraordinarily high. Our research has found that energy costs in remote communities can be six to 10 times higher than in southern Canada. These numbers are from a few years ago, which show extremely high costs, even with significant subsidies throughout the diesel supply chain. For households, these numbers aren't abstract. This month, in Yellowknife—where Lorne is, and it's Julia's hometown—local news reported that a resident is expecting to spend about \$8,500 on home heating, which is about \$3,000 more than last year. Households are already this fall trying to figure out how they can afford their heating costs before winter has even begun.

The vulnerability goes beyond the price of fuel. Shorter ice-road seasons, low water levels and other disruptions to fragile supply chains can turn an affordability problem into an energy security crisis. Governments and utilities then face the growing pressure to increase subsidies to simply keep household energy bills within a questionable reach. The cycle becomes costly: We spend more and more money managing the consequences of an energy system that is itself becoming less affordable and less reliable.

My third and final message is the most important one, which is that we already know what some of the solutions look like because northern and indigenous communities are building them. For decades, indigenous and northern leaders have advocated for clean energy as a way to reduce diesel dependence, to strengthen energy security and to keep more of the economic benefits of energy development within their communities. That leadership has resulted in hundreds of renewable energy projects, including community-led and community-owned wind, solar, hydro and, in some cases, grid connection partnerships.

Federal programs have played a critical role in enabling this progress. Since 2016, clean energy projects in remote communities have displaced over 142 million litres of diesel and, most recently, we're seeing more than 31 million litres of diesel displaced per year. This is remarkable and critical progress, but it's also very fragile. Some critical federal programs that have supported this progress have already or are at risk of ending—including CERRC, northern REACHE and the indigenous off-diesel initiative—while the demand for electricity and heat continues to grow and communities face increasing economic and climate pressures.

This is not the time to step back. The federal government has an important role in providing the sustained partnership that communities need, including support for early-stage project development, local capacity building and major infrastructure investment.

The good news is that we know that change is possible. Communities across the north are already proving it: The technologies exist, the expertise is growing, and we have seen that these investments can produce lower energy costs, stronger local economies and more resilient communities.

● (0840)

When we talk about affordability in the north, we should not only ask how governments can subsidize today's high costs. We should also ask how we can invest now to reduce costs and the risks behind them for decades to come. If we do that, Canada has an opportunity to fundamentally rewrite the story of energy affordability and reliability in the north.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much to all the witnesses for their great testimony.

We now start the next adventure here at committee, in which the rounds of questioning will begin.

We will kick it off with the Conservatives and Billy Morin for six minutes.

Billy Morin (Edmonton Northwest, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our guests today. Welcome.

I want to go to Mikey McBryan.

You talked about your family's history. I think you said that for over a century, your family has been in the north. Since time immemorial, indigenous people were there. The history of the north was mining. Then, it was oil and gas, and then diamonds. I think diamonds are on the downturn. There's talk of heavy military investment going into the north, which is great, because we need to defend our north, but at its highest level, it's a government program.

From your perspective, given all those boom and bust cycles, what are some of the lessons you would like to see learned by government, and what is the long-term strategic perspective? What can be done better than going through booms and busts and then these different government programs or high-level military dependency? What do you think is next for the north?

Mikey McBryan: Thank you for the question.

In fact, the “over a century” reference was just to the Irish side. My family's aboriginal side, of course, has been there forever.

It's a great question. The boom and bust cycle is important in a lot of ways because it drives different things, just like how war increases technology and all that stuff, which is not the nicest thing to say. The boom and bust cycle really throws in a lot of money, and you can see it fairly well in Alberta, where a lot of stuff comes in. My father always uses a saying famous in Alberta: “Please, Lord, give me one more oil boom. I promise not to mess this one up.”

I came onto the scene in the nineties when the gold was coming out, and diamonds just came out of nowhere. When I was in high school and then graduated, all my friends went into the diamond industry. They were graduating from high school, and then a year later, they were making more than the principal was. That was really good for the community.

There was a really good program wherein the people of Hay River, where I'm originally from, got housing. If you worked in the diamond mines and you lived in Hay River, there were programs in place. As soon as they got rid of that, almost everyone moved down to Okotoks and Calgary and those kinds of places.

That's the big thing, and I think that's what everyone is saying too. When these cycles happen, how do you leave something behind? It's the infrastructure and the economics of businesses.

Again, Buffalo Airways was built on a boom and bust cycle in the seventies with oil. We grew during diamonds, and we're growing right now with gold. I think it's an important part of the system.

● (0845)

Billy Morin: I appreciate the different perspective. Most people instinctively would say to get rid of the boom and bust cycles, but you're embracing it because it's the reality, and here's a strategic way of learning from it. That's pretty good.

Shannon, you provided three recommendations or solutions, and I want to go to your third one, which is real energy access for the Major Projects Office. It encompasses all three: natural gas, easily accessible programs and appliance upgrades. You also mentioned, which I heard as a common theme, that the real solutions are from northerners themselves.

There has been a renewed focus on oil and gas, for lack of a better word, which has been shunned over the last 10 years. We've now been in this Parliament for the better part of a year and a half. Have you seen any tangible changes in some of the initiatives you suggested over the last year and a half?

Shannon Joseph: There's been a change in that there's been a more positive message around oil and gas, but I don't think there's been a focus when it comes to housing and what this means for building codes. The building code is still kind of unfriendly to natural gas access, and a lot of the federal programs that we looked at that help communities with community energy are still not super friendly to natural gas.

The communities that we worked with in our research have been working on getting access to natural gas for decades, because it's the most affordable. Some of their neighbours benefited from provincial programs that extended that infrastructure, even when they were pretty far away from the major cities, and having that access allowed them to develop their tourism and to have recreational facilities that would be unaffordable to heat with electricity. They're looking at what the mix of energy solutions is that can work for their community so that they can get the things they want, and they want gas to be a part of it.

There's the jurisdictional gap I mentioned. We're exporting gas to the world from the Montney formation, and communities there are on propane. They would like the cheaper natural gas, and there's an infrastructure gap to fill it.

Can we be creative in how we use the federal programs that allow indigenous participation in major projects so that those programs can be a vehicle for those communities in getting that step up on infrastructure that gives communities access to these additional options? That's the important thing for Parliament to consider and for the government to try to close as a gap.

Billy Morin: Thank you for that.

Dr. Julia Christensen, you mentioned that the CMHC market is not exactly working for the north, which is a unique space. You mentioned the boom and bust cycle as well.

Do you have an idea of a low-hanging fruit in terms of systematic change for housing? It kind of reminds me of a typical first nation reserve, where mortgages are not the norm, but you're talking about a whole territory or multiple territories. Do you have any structural changes in mind in terms of market housing, or anything unique in how regulatory regimes can change in terms of home ownership? Maybe that's even the wrong term in itself.

Julia Christensen: Like some of the other presenters this morning, I think tremendous innovation already exists in the north. There's an opportunity to really celebrate and promote that and to look at how those innovations can be scaled up or made accessible in other parts of the north.

One example that I think of is the K'asho Got'ine Housing Society in Fort Good Hope, which is a housing society created out of the land claim, out of the self-government. In the community, basically since the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry in the 1970s, a desire was expressed to take back community control over housing, decision-making, housing administration and housing construction.

They have explored options for building a sawmill in the community to address some of the supply chain issues. They are doing training programs to train local youth in housing construction, maintenance and repair. They're also building a modular housing centre with the aim of becoming a regional hub for the Sahtu, and potentially for the Northwest Territories or even parts of Nunavut as well, as a northern-based centre for housing construction and housing delivery.

In looking at some of those models and thinking about ways to build local housing industries that are based in the north and that start out from this place, let's explore some of the supply chain challenges that we're experiencing. Are there solutions that we can examine that actually limit those challenges? What about training? Are there opportunities here for building on the number of people in the community who are looking for training and employment opportunities and could be working in the housing sector?

One of the—

● (0850)

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Dr. Christensen, I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to cut you off. We went a couple of minutes over. Unfortunately, I have to stop at some point.

We'll go the Liberals now.

Lori Idlout, you have six minutes.

Lori Idlout (Nunavut, Lib.): [*Member spoke in Inuktitut*]

[*English*]

First of all, welcome back to the committee members. It's good to see everyone, and thank you to all of the witnesses for sharing your expertise today.

I would like to highlight that there is a celebrity among us. Mikey, the work that the History Channel did with you in *Ice Pilots* really helped show just how important air travel is in the north.

You're stationed in the NWT in Yellowknife, but can you share with us if your airline flies into Nunavut as well?

Mikey McBryan: Yes, I can, for sure. Cambridge Bay is a big one. There's Resolute and even Alert, Iqaluit, Pelly, Gjoa, Spence—everybody. It's pretty much everywhere, depending on where people go. We go to Arctic Bay a lot. If it has a runway, we land there.

Lori Idlout: Have you noticed a difference in infrastructure needs that might exist between the NWT and Nunavut?

The reason I'm asking is that you're well aware that Nunavut communities are all fly-in communities, so the airline industry very much tends to be a lifeline for us.

You mentioned that when we're focusing on the economy, we need to make sure that we figure out ways to keep money in the territories so that it doesn't leave the territories. I wonder if you think that investing in airports and pavement could help keep that money in the territories. Could you share your views on that?

Mikey McBryan: I'm going to hurt my neck from nodding so much.

Yes, it's simple. Paving the runway in Cambridge Bay would instantaneously bring the cost of living down the next day. Cambridge Bay is a focal place. I love them there. Mayor Wayne and everybody there are great.

Because it has a gravel strip, it really limits the types of airplanes that can land there. I'm the one who shouldn't talk about it, because we land on gravel all the time. We invested heavily into a Boeing 737-300. It's a more economical freighting aircraft. It can haul 10,000 pounds more and burn 25% less fuel. We would be flying that to Cambridge Bay twice a week. Right now we're flying our Lockheed Electra and our 737-200, which burn about 20% more fuel and haul about 10,000 pounds less.

If you could snap your fingers and pave Cambridge Bay, that area would have 20% savings instantaneously. I don't care if it's military funding, if it's private funding or if it's government funding: Pave it. It'll make everything better.

Lori Idlout: Thank you so much for that. Paving the Cambridge Bay airport wouldn't benefit only Cambridge Bay but all of the region as well.

• (0855)

Mikey McBryan: It would be the whole place.

Lori Idlout: I also have questions for Julia Christensen.

We've been given great information by the Library of Parliament regarding housing. They collated information from the Auditor General and from the CMHC. They've highlighted that the majority of Nunavut relies on public housing.

There are about 6,000 people. Of those 6,000, 45% are living in overcrowded housing conditions and 40% are in core need, with 97% of those being Inuit. I wonder if you could share with us what kind of impact that has on the well-being of Nunavummiut.

Julia Christensen: It has significant impacts for Nunavummiut, in particular with respect to the intersections between housing costs and food costs.

Of course, food insecurity is a lived reality for so many Nunavummiut families. I've heard countless examples of families that are faced with very tough decisions over paying their rent, paying to put food on the table and paying for other household supplies—diapers, cleaning supplies, etc. Those are the kinds of very real challenges that families are facing month to month.

The way that rent is established doesn't leave much wiggle room at all to be able to also provide for culturally expected sharing practices with respect to money and with respect to food, etc. It really

impacts the ability to take care of those living within the house and then extended family as well.

We know that overcrowding has very significant health impacts in terms of public health as well as mental health. The health costs are also intersecting with housing costs in Nunavut in particular, and across Inuit Nunangat.

Lori Idlout: Thank you so much.

I'm sure that it also contributes to people's ability to be economically independent. The CMHC, for example, has said that the private market is not affordable in Nunavut. Less than 20% can purchase their home, and the poverty rate in Nunavut is quite high. It was at 44.5% in 2022, compared to 9.9% in the provinces.

Keeping that in mind, what kinds of programs would you recommend need to be done to improve housing in Nunavut?

Julia Christensen: The chronic underfunding of housing is really the first hurdle that needs to be overcome. There simply has not been enough money invested in housing in terms of both increasing housing stock and maintaining and repairing existing housing stock. Those two things need to be happening at the same time.

I think we also really need to come back not to the drawing board but to speaking with Nunavummiut about what home ownership looks like in the context of Nunavut. It might be home ownership more at the community level in the sense of collective ownership, collective accountability and collective buy-in, where those individual units aren't solely the responsibility of individual households. Lorne really underscored this with his testimony. The costs of fuel and fuel transportation are just adding to the cost of maintaining housing.

Home ownership as it exists in southern Canada is simply not a feasible reality. It's really driving so many families into further unaffordability crises, because they're defaulting on mortgages offered through the Nunavut Housing Corporation or Housing NWT.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much, Lori.

We will now go to the Bloc.

Madame Gill, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

Marilène Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan, BQ): Thank you very much.

I am also happy to be back at the committee as the session resumes.

Thank you to all the witnesses for joining us. Some of the testimony resonates with me as representative of a northern region.

Mr. McBryan, Boeings are not landing in my region, just very small airplanes flown by bush pilots. However, as my colleague Ms. Idlout said, planes are important for our region. In fact, they are a matter of survival. I imagine that, for you, the issue of northern infrastructure, as we've talked about, is extremely important. Not only do we have to build infrastructure, we also have to maintain and preserve it.

You are nodding your approval. I was hoping to hear those comments, because some communities depend on airplanes for supplies, workers, and so on. Economic development depends on airplanes, it's that simple. For the moment, there is nothing else. There are no roads. However, I know that the government may want to abandon this infrastructure, but I'm satisfied to hear that they are necessary for the development of the north.

You also said that it's a matter of who controls the money and where the money goes. That's important for us as well. People want to live in the north, and it's been like that for generations. Mining towns are popping up everywhere. People get there, and after a while, they want to stay there. They work at the mine all their lives. It becomes their home and they no longer want to go "down south" as we say. They want to stay up north. They want to contribute to the local development. However, it's very difficult for them, because if they don't work at the mine, where do they work? There's nothing else. They'd like to have a house, but there aren't any: they belong to the mine. They'd like to start a business, but it has to be related to the mine.

What could the government or elected officials, like us, do to support community empowerment, which I think communities want, so that they have more power to make decisions?

For example, as Ms. Christensen said, there's the issue of housing, which is totally inadequate. Back home, there's a wall in town facing north to cut the wind. We don't have that in the south. Everyone lives behind that wall, all services are offered behind that wall.

In short, what could we do to have control?

You also talked about fly-in, fly-out operations, what we call in French, "une navette aérienne." We have a lot of those back home.

What can we do to ensure that people contribute to the community, develop the community and obviously stay in the community? It is indeed a matter of land use. We want to extract resources, as you said, but we also want that money to come back to us for development. I'll let you speak. I've said a lot, but, as you can see, I agree with you.

● (0900)

[English]

Mikey McBryan: No, I think that's great. What's funny about the whole thing is that, yes, you have to expand the airports. That in turn creates jobs. You have to be very skilled to take care of the airports. There's Nav Canada and the weather. All that stuff is an opportunity and not just a cost in terms of the infrastructure of everything. Those skills are then worldwide, which is great.

I want to touch on another point. We actually have firefighting aircraft in Val-d'Or, Quebec. We work with SOPFEU. There's a Yellowstone company now. Because of the expertise from having

things local, we're able to go and fight fire in Quebec, which is awesome.

Yes, support local infrastructure and support airports—I'm biased—as much as you can. Make them as long, as flat and as paved as possible. That's simply it.

[Translation]

Marilène Gill: Let's talk about the second part of my question. If we talked, for example, about everything that could be done to ensure the money stays in the north, would you have any ideas on how to do that?

[English]

Mikey McBryan: It's to make it home. The more a place feels like home, with hunting, fishing and wildlife.... In the north, it's a similar story everywhere.

It's not for everybody. There are nine billion people, and there are 40,000 in the territories. You have to attract the right people and give them reasons to stay. A lot of it is internal. It's the people who like wilderness and stuff. Don't force people who don't want to be there. That's a problem too.

It's a tough question. Just make it accessible for the people who want to stay. The adage is, "I came for two weeks and I stayed for the rest of my life." That's the common thing we hear every time.

We just have to get people in and show them our best face. Part of that is to make sure the community is nice, safe and secure, which is very important.

[Translation]

Marilène Gill: Thank you.

I know I only have 20 seconds left, so I'll turn to Ms. Christensen.

I'm interested in the research you do. There is what we would call in French, "un impensé du Nord," a northern taboo. You talked about housing, which is inappropriate. Since I don't have much time, perhaps you could send us some information about your work.

I know you talked about this a little earlier, but I'd like to have more information on what could be done. You talked about labour, the cost of materials and the supply chain. It's all well and good to have a will, but we need a lot of help to, at the very least, get organized. You talked about local industry. There are indigenous communities of 200 people in my riding, so that's impossible.

What can we do about that? We don't want to impose one-size-fits-all solutions. Each community has its own challenges and advantages.

Julia Christensen: Thank you for the question.

I can send you documents about the research we've already done, if it can help you in your study.

● (0905)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much to our first round.

We now kick off our second round. We'll go to Marc Dalton for five minutes.

Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today. It's fascinating. I'm glad to be a new member of this committee. It's very interesting.

My first question is for Mikey with Buffalo Airways.

Your company has been in operation for 56 years, so your company and your family have had your fingers on the pulse of what's been happening over the years. I'm wondering about the trends over the past decade.

There are passengers and then there's freight. Just with regard to passengers, I'm interested in knowing the percentage of government-related passengers, as opposed to business passengers or tourists. Tell me where that's at right now and how the trend has been over the past number of years.

Mikey McBryan: Yes, there are two separate things in that. There's the scheduled passenger service, which we don't do anymore. We do the charter side. A lot of that is with the government. We do a lot of RCMP flying. We basically call it Uber, because they call and they need a SWAT team somewhere. They need everything.

Also, a lot of the communities don't have a full-time plumber or a full-time electrician. When there's a problem, we have airplanes on standby, and there are a lot of government things in place to get the specialized labour to the communities in a very quick time.

On that whole thing about passengers and cargo, we're mostly cargo right now. I want to say 80% of our revenue with Nunavut right now is probably because of the policies in place and the favourable stuff with mining, especially gold. Right now, passengers are a tough thing in the north. Government programs, such as medical travel, are big. I can't speak for other companies, but I can speak about it. The cornerstone to get scheduled passenger service to the small communities is medical travel, which is subsidized by the government.

Also, food is another big thing. There are programs in place, and I wish there were more, because getting food into the communities is a big deal.

Marc Dalton: I'm glad to hear you saying that a lot of your business stays with Nunavut, with the mining industry. I think that's important. It's a good sign because it relates to business, the economy and the fact that rather than just having subsidies or transfers, it's the private sector that is paying for a lot of the business.

Are you saying that's going in a good direction at this point as far as the private sector and the mining industry are concerned? Is that on the upswing, or is it going down, on the whole, for your business—or just shifting around?

Mikey McBryan: We're in a boom right now. This is a gold boom right now, which is good.

Marc Dalton: Okay.

Mikey McBryan: For example, Buffalo Airways is fully private. We invested in a 737-300, which is expensive. We bought new fire-fighting airplanes, which are expensive. In a low time, we couldn't do that without some crazy funding. Literally, this is money that we took out of the bank and bought the airplanes with. There are no loans. There's nothing. We've probably spent close to \$20 million in the last four years. That's private money helping the north.

When Norman Wells had the issue, we brought in our 737-300. Again, that was efficient. We had a program called "air barge", and we got the price in Norman Wells down to 60¢ per pound, which is unheard of. I don't think you can do that even from Edmonton to Calgary. We're able to use our airplane to bring down the cost of living for an emergency situation, like the one we had in Norman Wells two years ago now.

Marc Dalton: That's great. Thanks.

I'm going to Shannon Joseph.

You were discussing LNG or natural gas, which, as an MP from British Columbia, is music to my ears. We have a plentiful supply.

What is the hindrance for getting more access to natural gas in the communities? I guess one of the questions is on the cost-benefit. It seems that this would be a real benefit, but from your perspective, should the cost be something that should be manageable and very beneficial?

Shannon Joseph: In terms of an energy use perspective in British Columbia, electricity is \$40 a gigajoule and natural gas is \$19. There's an important price difference. That's why many households in British Columbia heat with gas where the infrastructure is available.

In the north, there's a lot of natural gas infrastructure for transmission to markets and other places. To build it or to build the processing infrastructure so that you can have household natural gas in Blueberry River First Nations or in the Nisga'a costs money, and it's money that cannot be recovered by rates because of the population in those communities and the inability to share that cost across all of the rate base in British Columbia. Ontario has solved that problem with their program of a dollar per ratepayer.

There are federal programs. We identified about \$14 billion in federal programs for community energy and these kinds of things that are out there, but they really don't support this kind of project.

I think what we're saying is that at the household level, there's a real benefit to filling this gap. The resource is there. Part of the infrastructure is there. We just need a resource. There are federal programs out there. They just don't really address this to close that infrastructure gap so that these communities can have that affordable energy access. That gives them way more options.

• (0910)

Marc Dalton: Thank you.

It's been six minutes. I think we're over.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Are you over? I'm sorry. It's just by a bit. You were about 45 seconds over. I'm sorry about that. I thought you had 45 seconds left.

All right. We're going to Philip Earle.

You have five minutes.

Philip Earle (Labrador, Lib.): Hi, Mikey. Thanks for coming. I know that there are a lot of things you could be doing this morning.

I come out of your industry, and I couldn't be prouder to be here at committee with you and talking about the north. I'm from the north, as you'll see with a lot of the MPs on the committee. I have northern roots and represent northern people.

I view you, as the airline, as the last link in the supply chain. Things originate in the south and you make sure they get to people in the north.

Talk to the committee about measures you take as a business leader in a family business to aid in reducing costs for northerners.

Mikey McBryan: Rate is aircraft type. At Buffalo Airways, we're very unique in the different airplanes we have. We have everything from a Twin Otter to a 737-300 and everything in between.

You have to be kind of like a Swiss army knife to be able to react to what the customer wants. It's not what the pilots want or the owners want. It's always what the customer wants. Having diversity in everything, in every aspect of the business, is why we've lasted 56 years. Most airlines don't. There are a lot of airlines that haven't lasted the length of this conference. They come and go like crazy.

Yes, the thing is to get through the day and have availability. The way I look at it is that it's like a convenience store in a small town. You have to do everything. You have to change the oil, you have to cut the hair and you have to provide everything. That's what a northern airline has to do. It's to be as diverse as possible and really answer what the customer wants, because at the end of the day, it's just the customer.

Philip Earle: Thank you for that.

I think what I heard you say is that you're always looking for efficiency, whether it's in the payload, the fuel burn or the cross-utilization of aircraft and those types of things.

My colleague talked about airport infrastructure. To the extent that you can, talk to the committee about the importance of having modern airport infrastructure, whether that's cargo holding or temperature control. I like what you had to say about airports and asphalt, and how that allows for a diversity of aircraft to get in. Expand on that a bit more for us if you can.

Why is that so important to a business serving people who live in the north, and how can it reduce costs for the people who live there?

Mikey McBryan: For sure. You know spoilage. Just like any of you, anybody who's spent any time at a grocery store can see spoilage. As you go north, it gets worse and worse. Having facilities that can quickly move food, because food needs to move quickly.... A lot of food that doesn't need to move quickly isn't necessarily the most healthy. The healthier it is, the more volatile it is, so you have to move it quickly, which means you have to have really good infrastructure. Again, that's expensive. You have to bring everything in, and it's this self-fulfilling thing.

Yes, it's very important. Everything's important. In the north, it's miles.... Think about it. If you're on Mars, you have to get everything there. This is the exact same.

• (0915)

Philip Earle: Thank you.

As you know, we're part of the same fraternity. I know how difficult it is to attract skilled labour. Aircraft maintenance engineers, whether they're coming from SAIT in Alberta or the College of the North Atlantic in Newfoundland and Labrador, are very important. You've heard that our government has set aside and budgeted \$6 billion for an apprenticeship program, which aircraft maintenance engineers and other apprenticeships would be able to apply and qualify for.

How important is it to your business, running it in Yellowknife with some of the sub-bases you have and taking care of those water bombers, to have those apprenticeships for people to become licensed engineers and be able to work for you?

Mikey McBryan: It's huge. Managers are a dime a dozen. Anyone can be a manager, but not anyone can fix airplanes. It takes a lot of skill, labour, time and education to do it properly. Sometimes, yes, it's tough, but you have to be able to keep the ones you have. It's generational. There are a lot of people who are third-generation aircraft mechanics now.

Philip Earle: How has it been a challenge for a northern aviation company to find those licensed AMEs to be able to turn wrenches and maintain the aircraft so that they're serviceable for that eight o'clock in the morning flight?

Mikey McBryan: It takes everything short of kidnapping them, really.

Philip Earle: Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much, Mr. Earle.

I actually want to quickly mention that we have a few new members around the table, so welcome to our new members.

Congratulations on your by-election win. Nicely done.

We have another questioner. Go ahead, Madame Gill, for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. McBryan, we spoke about transportation and all the related challenges. Still, we have competition when it comes to choosing between food, equipment or human beings. The enormous cost is an issue. It's becoming almost impossible for us to leave the north given the high cost. However, people obviously need health care services, for example. Some people can't even attend school in the north. They really need to leave and go to other places. Do you see any solutions to this?

I can even give you an example that really affected me, the one concerning Randy Jones. I believe that my colleague, Mr. Earle, knew him as well. Randy Jones passed away. He was unable to board the plane, and his family wonders what might have happened if he had been able to board the plane. He was a heavyset man who was denied boarding because of regulations. I understand that there are regulations. However, I still wonder whether they could be adjusted.

We spoke about adjustments in the housing sector, but I'm also thinking about adjustments in air transportation. What can be done to ensure that everyone gets what they need and that we don't have competition in our area? If there's transportation for Canada Post, we would rather have transportation for people than letters. Drugs and food play a role in all this. What can we do to ensure that everyone gets what they need?

I know that you operate on a larger scale, with cargo planes. For us, it's a different matter. However, I'm sure that you can suggest some possible solutions. Obviously, there are also other issues for the workers.

[English]

Mikey McBryan: The medevac system, the government thing in place for moving people around and stuff like that, is very important, but a lot of the stuff we do falls outside of that. There's a TV show going on that.... Actually, I signed an NDA on that.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mikey McBryan: There are problems that are outside the government. We have to send airplanes to go and save them and all that stuff. The medevac thing is a cornerstone for airlines in the north. When you have those contracts, that is something you can build upon. There are two airlines in Yellowknife that have been built on those medevac contracts. They're very important. There are back-ups in the north too. There are different aircraft types. You can expand and do that kind of stuff.

Yes, it's hugely important. I could talk for hours on this, really, but I don't want to spend someone else's time.

• (0920)

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): You have 10 seconds left.

Mikey McBryan: Again, it's super important. Medical travel is hugely important. It's a tough thing because it needs funding. It's very hard to do privatized, because when people are hurt and sick.... I got a message yesterday about a community member in Cambridge Bay who needed to get to Edmonton. Their daughter was in the hospital and they didn't have commercial service out. It's heart-breaking. As a private company, it costs tens of thousands of dollars to send an airplane up.

Competition is great—I shouldn't say that, but it is—for the end-user. The more competition, the better, but it's also important for medevac to be government-funded.

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Perfect. Thank you very much.

Next up is Tako Van Popta for five minutes.

Tako Van Popta (Langley Township—Fraser Heights, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here. I'm new to the committee, so this is all very interesting to me. I'm a southerner, being from metro Vancouver and right on the U.S. border, so this is really enlightening.

Lynne, my question is for you, but my preamble relates to evidence given by Shannon and Lorne. Shannon made the point that while natural gas might be cheap or inexpensive, the delivery thereof is not. I think Lorne made the same point, but probably talking more about fuel. It's 50¢ a litre if it comes by barge and five dollars a litre if it comes by air transport. You know, that's not unusual at all. Even in big cities like mine, when I look at my Fortis bill, the cost is broken down. Half of it is for delivery, even though we have a lot of infrastructure for natural gas delivery.

Lynne, you talked about perhaps some other alternatives that might be possible for local development. I think you talked about wind energy. I don't know if you mentioned solar energy. For a good part of the year, there isn't a lot of sunshine. Will local infrastructure be part of the solution? Perhaps you could talk about that.

Lynne Couves: Thank you for the question.

More local infrastructure needs to be part of the solution. When energy is more locally generated, it is more secure. We have many examples of this already. You mentioned wind. Yes, wind does tend to be quite successful in many parts of the north, as does solar energy. When we talk about energy systems and about secure, affordable and reliable energy systems, we want to see what we call "integrated" energy systems. These are energy systems that have multiple sources of energy and aren't relying on just one source of energy.

Some of the challenges around that can be the economics. It requires some rethinking about the economic status quo of relying on one source of energy for all of a community's energy needs.

Tako Van Popta: Understood. Is this something that can be expanded in a cost-effective manner, keeping in mind that the competition is delivering natural gas, which is very expensive, or electricity, which is also expensive?

Lynne Couves: I do think we are starting to see more examples of regions being able to bulk-purchase wind turbines, for example, rather than doing one-off, one-off and one-off, which does tend to be quite expensive. If an entire region is looking at making a bulk purchase of solar panels and getting them distributed, or a bulk purchase of wind turbines, that does help reduce the economics of scale.

The power of economies of scale in remote communities is currently being explored in different regions. That's something we are following and looking to learn more information about in order to understand what that cost benefit might be.

Tako Van Popta: Thank you.

Mr. Browne, do you have anything to add to that?

Lorne Browne: Yes. Thanks for the opportunity.

I think, in terms of energy security, it's displacing fuel with renewables such as wind and solar, and maybe on the backside of that, looking at renewable fuels and biofuels, which have technical challenges in the north but I think more work can be done on that. What Shannon was referring to, in situ resource utilization—so, using local resources—is pretty important too. As Lynne mentioned, that does provide energy security.

Here in the Northwest Territories, I can give one excellent example. Fourteen kilometres south of Tuktoyaktuk, there is a well that we refer to colloquially as M-18. It is in the process of being developed through the Inuvialuit energy security project—I hope I got that correct. They are seeking to pull natural gas out of that well and chemically crack that gas into a synthetic diesel product, which would supply the region, essentially, for, I think, more than 20 years.

Ideally we would pipe natural gas to all the communities that Shannon referred to, but that is prohibitively expensive. Storing LNG or CNG is also prohibitively expensive. They've chosen to take the route of creating a liquid fuel from the gas. That will provide energy security, and we're also hoping that it will reduce costs considerably. Therefore, in situ resource utilization is an important concept.

• (0925)

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): Thank you very much, Mr. Van Popta.

Next up, we have Ms. Lavack for five minutes.

[Translation]

Ginette Lavack (St. Boniface—St. Vital, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to welcome all my colleagues to Ottawa. It's a pleasure to see them again. I would also like to welcome the new com-

mittee members. I was delighted to see the teamwork in this committee. I look forward to continuing along the same lines.

I would like to thank all the witnesses for joining us and for sharing their testimonies.

Ms. Christensen, I would like to ask you two questions this morning.

In my role as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, I assist the minister in developing a housing strategy, specifically a national housing strategy for indigenous people. I also work alongside colleagues on a task force on homelessness.

I'm curious to learn a bit more about your work. You argued that some of the tools used to assess housing needs fail to adequately reflect the realities in the north. Could you elaborate on the shortcomings of these tools? Is there a better way for us to assess the actual needs?

Afterwards, I'll have a second question.

Julia Christensen: Thank you, Ms. Lavack. Sorry, but I'll respond in English since I'll be speaking more quickly.

[English]

We have the time limits.

Thank you so much for that question. There is so much that I would love to say.

The core housing need tool that's used in housing needs assessments is an example of where we're looking more particularly at the number of people in a community who need to be housed, the housing that exists and whether that housing—and the number of bedrooms, for example, in each house—best matches the population.

What we hear, particularly from indigenous self-government of housing initiatives, is that there is a need, as a community, to be able to assess whether that measure accurately reflects the housing priorities. For example, in its housing plan, the Tłı̨chǫ government has prioritized housing for teachers, knowing that there are teachers from the community or from the region, of course, but also that there are teachers coming from outside. It recognizes, though, that every year there's a challenge in terms of beginning school in September because there aren't teachers because there's no housing for teachers.

While that might not address that core housing need metric in terms of matching or prioritizing housing for existing members of the community, it's taking a step back and saying, "Education is important for our community, and we want to ensure that our children are educated and that there's sustainability in education." I think broadening our assessment of core housing need and how those needs and priorities are assessed is very important.

With respect to homelessness strategies in the north, we know that mobility and migration are such a huge factor in indigenous experiences of homelessness in particular—moving between family members, moving between places. Therefore, when we're looking at an indigenous homelessness strategy, whether it's for Inuit, first nations or Métis, we really need to also be looking outside the north and at some of those centres that are of importance to people who are looking to access support services and housing. We need to recognize that this kind of geography of homelessness and of supports for people who are unhoused has to be expanded beyond the north.

Ginette Lavack: Thank you.

I have one last quick question.

[*Translation*]

Regarding other current challenges, municipal zoning reform in the north is one of them. Is it keeping pace with the construction of new housing? Could we make any improvements to municipal zoning?

[*English*]

Julia Christensen: You can look at the city of Yellowknife for an example of challenges with respect to municipal zoning. Some of that has to do with ongoing land claim negotiations in the Akaitcho, but it also has to do with red tape and bureaucracy in terms of land transfer from the territorial government to the municipal government.

Zoning and the ability to expand are absolutely central to addressing housing needs in a regional centre like Yellowknife, for example, but we also need to be looking at, again, this dependency on home ownership and also on single detached housing, and really considering if there are ways of increasing the densification of housing—both in large centres as well as in smaller communities—that respond to local context, local needs and priorities, and cultural needs as well.

There's a lot more that I could say, but I know we're limited on time.

● (0930)

[*Translation*]

Ginette Lavack: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Jamie Schmale): That's excellent.

Thank you very much to all our witnesses. That concludes the period of time we have available. We appreciate that you've made time to be here. Thank you for answering our questions.

We will suspend momentarily and go into a closed session to discuss some committee business.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>