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Mr. Colin Mayes

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Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

Monday, June 12, 2006

• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC)): Could I please open this meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, on this Monday, June 12, 2006.

Committee members, the witnesses haven't arrived yet, but it was suggested that we could possibly go over a few of the questions of where we want to focus on education. Mr. Préfontaine is also handing out a list of potential witnesses the committee might want to summon for some future meetings.

I know that the subcommittee was going to meet tomorrow and discuss where we want to focus on education. Maybe we could have a little discussion on that right now, if that's the pleasure of the committee. We can just get some ideas out there, and then see if our witnesses show up. Then we'll proceed.

Madam Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Before anybody looks at list and goes, holy mackerel, what was she thinking, I would say in explanation that my list is extensive because the committee did not have a focus in terms of what it wanted to look at specifically in education. So I was a bit challenged around submitting witnesses, when I wasn't sure where we were going.

I wonder if the committee might want to consider the fact that based on the Auditor General's report of 2004, the department is in the process of developing the policy and the framework piece in close consultation with first nations across the country, and down to the community level. I am wondering if we might want to wait for that document to come forward before looking at the K to 12 system.

What I would suggest is that perhaps there's an opportunity for us to look at post-secondary trades and technical education instead, while we're waiting for that policy document to come forward from INAC. Otherwise, it would seem like we would be duplicating work that's in progress.

The Chair: Thank you. It's a good suggestion.

Mr. Lemay.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): In my opinion, we should focus on the practical side of things in our questions to witnesses. So I beg of you not to bring along aboriginal

education thinkers who would talk to us about the report they drafted in response to the previous one. What Bloc members are interested in is the practical side of things. How do things work in the communities? Most of all, what are your expectations in terms of the education of first nation people, the Inuit, the Métis, in the broadest sense possible? I can assure you that we will ask very practical questions to the witnesses we selected. What do you want to do? What have you done? What will you do about education development among first nations people, the Inuit, the Métis, etc.?

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We have witnesses now. Do you want to proceed with the witness, or do you want to continue this discussion?

Okay, we'll proceed with the witnesses.

The witness we have today is from the Native Women's Association of Canada, Anita Olsen-Harper, the Sisters in Spirit team lead. Welcome.

We also have Karen Schuyler from community development. Welcome.

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper (Sisters in Spirit Team Lead, Native Women's Association of Canada): First of all, I want to apologize for being late. We did get caught up in the security downstairs.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Oh, yes?

[English]

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): That's reassuring.

The Chair: We always feel safer with the security being there, even if they do slow things down.

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: I'm going to begin with the introduction.

The Native Women's Association of Canada's mission is to help empower aboriginal women by being involved in developing and changing relevant legislation, and by involving aboriginal women in developing and delivering programs and services that promote equal opportunity for them.

I'm going to identify some overarching objectives and priorities in the area of education for aboriginal women in Canada; then I'll recommend a approaches and options for programming that will improve access to lifelong learning opportunities for aboriginal women.

NWAC believes that the responsibility of education begins in the home, that families can nurture their children to be proud of who they are and to be comfortable in a predominantly non-aboriginal environment. We envision a community where all aboriginal people accept and exercise their responsibilities in contributing to a strong community.

• (1540)

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: Many aboriginal women do accept this responsibility, but in order to exercise that responsibility to the fullest, they must have a voice regarding the educational opportunities that should be available in all the communities in which they live. This would be their way of ensuring that not only the curriculum content but also the pedagogy and/or andragogy are culturally appropriate, as well as reflecting their needs and priorities.

NWAC fully subscribes to the philosophy of lifelong learning. We know that to succeed in life, one needs to continually update skills, challenge one's own belief system, self-assess abilities, and expose oneself to current thinking.

One of the reasons lifelong education has become so important is the acceleration of scientific and technological progress in today's society. Despite the increased duration of primary, secondary, and university education, somewhere between 14 and 18 years, depending on the area of the country, the knowledge and the skills acquired are usually not sufficient for a professional career that spans three or four decades.

Basic supports. For aboriginal women, access and increased integration into lifelong learning initiatives are essential. However, basic supports are just as vital as the access itself. This is particularly the case for single-parent women, low-income families, and those living in rural, remote, or Arctic communities. Essential environmental supports include affordable housing for aboriginal women, with a priority for single parents on and off reserves; adequate funding for basic living expenses as well as educational resources and technological hardware; and safe, reliable, and accessible child care facilities.

Aboriginal women, for too long, have had to make the choice between providing for their families in low-paying jobs or struggling and going without to make ends meet while they continue their education. In fact, many aboriginal women living in poverty not only have to look after themselves but also must care for elderly parents, raise children, and/or tend loved ones who are in ill health, often with only a single income. These living conditions are not the best for furthering self-esteem and for achieving educational goals.

Rather than having to make this choice, positive steps are needed for creating a learning culture in aboriginal communities. Providing meaningful support can challenge even those most reticent in continuing their education or skills development. A relationship/partnership model brings together aboriginal and mainstream communities for a wide range of community partnerships to support lifelong learning needs. It would encourage a lifelong learning trend and fill the gaps for those who require upgrading and/or skills development.

Curriculum research and development. This area must prioritize aboriginal culture and recognize the traditional learning methods and tools that are used by aboriginal people. Educational programs, from

kindergarten to post-secondary levels, must be enhanced with accurate historical aboriginal content and appropriate cultural teachings. Aboriginal women must be integral to the research, the design, the development, and delivery of curriculum in all institutions. Greater emphasis is required to incorporate within aboriginal curriculum the traditional roles of aboriginal women within the community. Further, gender equality issues and teachings on positive relationship-building between men and women and in family life is an urgent priority.

Additional gender-specific research is greatly needed to determine all aspects of lifelong learning initiatives. Other options could explore learning, with accreditation in the workplace, allowing programs to integrate work practicum with advancement opportunities for women. These approaches provide the flexibility for aboriginal women to meet their lifelong learning goals.

• (1545)

Sustainability and capacity-building. Aboriginal youth comprise the fastest growing segment in the Canadian population. An investment in education, skills, and training for trades will fill the gaps in the market for professionals and skilled tradespeople.

Additional ways of sustained lifelong learning include, one, giving aboriginal learning institutions priority to evolve into public institutions to enable access to funding formulae that are available from provincial governments; two, incentive programming with remuneration agreements for graduating students; and three, employment options within communities for certain terms may help to support funding and demands for human resource development.

In terms of other essential factors, the federal government must clearly articulate support and provide adequate financial resources for the transfer of jurisdiction and control of education to aboriginal-controlled educational institutions. Government policy must support aboriginal learning institutions and educational programming at all levels, whether primary, secondary, or post-secondary.

Governments must recognize that learning happens through many non-traditional methods and must provide aboriginal women with sufficient support to access these opportunities in ways that are most suitable to individual circumstances. Leading researchers acknowledge the validity of traditional knowledge for filling gaps in western and scientific knowledge.

Aboriginal women must be assured an equal role in decision-making at all levels of education, from governance to policy reform. Aboriginal women must be included in developing and maintaining partnerships among mainstream public authorities, education service providers, the business sector, different associations, guidance services, and research centres.

Education and training systems need to recognize competencies acquired not only in formal but in non-formal and informal settings. This must be established between the government and academic partners. Law and government policies need an approach to lifelong learning whereby competencies can be certified irrespective of how they were acquired. Competencies acquired through work should be assessed and potentially recognized in the same way as those acquired through formal institutions.

Federal transfers to the province and territories must be increased to support educational programming and for lifelong learning to be accessible for aboriginal people, for example, whether they live on or off the reserve.

Educational programming from kindergarten to post-secondary levels must be enhanced with accurate, historical aboriginal content and appropriate cultural teachings. Aboriginal women must be integral to the research, design, development, and delivery of the curriculum throughout all institutions.

I'm now going to move to the recommendations.

Incentive mortgage rates through CMHC or through partnerships with federal commercial banks need be made available for aboriginal people, in particular aboriginal women returning to school and achieving accreditation

Priority must be given for northern remote and Arctic communities to have access to telephone lines, Internet connections and/or hardware, and resources such as mentoring and coaching for learning at home and within the community

The federal government needs to establish learning centres for aboriginal women that respond to local choices and needs. Each centre must be provided with adequate resources to create programming that includes access to information, technology and learning facilities, self-directed and modular training, and distance learning through video conferences and community websites.

● (1550)

In conclusion, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the racialized, sexualized violence that aboriginal women experience all over this country. A 1996 INAC study showed that the mortality rate because of violence is five times higher for aboriginal women than it is for other Canadian women between the ages of 25 and 44. The correlation between poverty and violence has been established, and the major reason aboriginal women continue to struggle with being impoverished is lack of education. High rates of violence experienced by aboriginal women definitely have negative impacts on youth and children, and the cycles of violence keep being perpetuated.

Low education levels create poverty, and poverty often breeds violence. It is only through empowerment through proper education that aboriginal women and their roles in the family, in the

community, and within their first nation can once again gain the respect that they always held in the traditional communities. Higher learning allows work within communities, which in turn achieves a higher life quality.

We trust that you recognize, as we do, that educated aboriginal women provide much-needed support for the entire family's learning, that a fundamental concept is that education of women and girls is central to the process of community development, and that the gains and advancements accomplished by aboriginal women benefit everybody.

Meegwetch.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for the submission.

The protocol here is that I have a list of those who would like to ask questions, so if you wouldn't mind responding to those, I'd appreciate that.

I'll ask the questioners to be brief, and we'll start off with Mr. Merasty.

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): Thank you, Chairman.

I think your presentation was excellent. Being an educator myself, and having worked in the field for many years in aboriginal communities—first nations on-reserve and off-reserve—I can say that one of the big issues, and you touched upon this, is the importance of early childhood, the Head Start program.

I'm not sure if you're familiar with the process that will kick in from this government on July 1, the \$1,200 allowance, and the early learning opportunity program they have through a tax credit proposal. It's our belief that, number one, the child tax benefit supplement that goes to low income is going to be clawed back. You're going to get that \$100 a month only. If you're living on-reserve the tax rate increases, so that's potentially less money in the pockets of single-parent families in inner-city neighbourhoods and on-reserve.

Second, the tax credit proposal talks about giving tax credits to businesses to build early learning and child care centres. That won't allow for on-reserve or economically marginalized neighbourhoods like inner cities.

How do you think it will affect the provision for early child care and early learning if these policies go forward?

Ms. Karen Schuyler (Community Development, Native Women's Association of Canada): Given the fact that a lot of our aboriginal women don't have a lot of income, I don't see any benefit from the tax credit at all. As a matter of fact, taking dollars from the welfare that they already get just furthers their poverty.

•(1555)

Mr. Gary Merasty: Changing gears a bit, I read the "Stolen Sisters" report and the INAC report you've talked about. I used to work within our tribal council, in the Prince Albert Grand Council Women's Commission, and I organized walks and events to promote raising awareness to prevent violence. One of the big recommendations that has always come out is about education. That's why we're here today, and that's why you're here today.

What role do you think the federal government should play to support aboriginal students on- and off-reserve to address some of these issues to stay in school, understanding that the provinces have the jurisdiction when it's off-reserve, and the first nations have it when it's on-reserve?

What specific ideas might you have that could support stay-in-school initiatives and improve graduation rates, especially for girls, in those two communities?

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: I'll take a stab at answering that.

I really believe an educational system has to be interesting and relevant. I really believe most educational curricula across the country are not very friendly towards aboriginal people. I find that we are not really represented in an adequate light, and in fact many times the images are pejorative, to put it bluntly.

It does not inspire students to want to continue on in that stream when this is the case so often. I suggest that one way to remedy this would be to allow further resources for curriculum development, delivery, and design within the community and tailored to the needs of that particular community.

Mr. Gary Merasty: So you would ask that the federal government provide some incentive for partnerships to occur to develop the curriculum and move forward in that direction?

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: Yes, that would be one way of addressing it.

Mr. Gary Merasty: I have one quick question to either one.

Women right now out-graduate men approximately five to one, and one of the things that one of your members, Sandra Opikokew, and others where I come from discussed is how this is a concern for women because it leaves the men unhealthy. It is a women's issue where women out-graduate men in post-secondary sometimes five to one. They were telling us that this needs to be addressed as well, that this men's issue is also a women's issue, because if they are undereducated and at home, or underemployed, it leads to poverty issues that result in violence and so on.

What is your view on that?

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: I really believe that what Sandra has said is extremely valid. But I guess you have to look at it from a historical context as well, because somebody had to do something. I suggest that the reason it has been women who have taken this first step is that we have had the major child nurturing responsibilities and the responsibilities towards our parents for keeping them and to have our roles within the communities. Some of those are, of course, traditional roles. So I very much empathize with the lack of programming for men on reserves.

Mr. Gary Merasty: Do I have any time left?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Mr. Gary Merasty: That's what they were saying, that women have been the carriers of the economy. That's the socio-economic reality, especially on reserves where the majority of the employment is held by women. Unfortunately, because of high rates of violence, sometimes that's traced back to the undereducation of another segment of the population, and that raises concerns. So I'm encouraged to hear that.

In post-secondary and further, I don't know if you're familiar with Indian student support funding and PSSP, the post-secondary students support program, policies. What do you think needs to happen? What type of investment do you think needs to happen for institutions and for students to continue to see an increase in graduations of aboriginal students?

•(1600)

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: I think there are several things that could be done, but I believe there have to be more access programs at the university level. For example, the University of Manitoba has had some very good successes with access programs into the trades, which are extremely valid. Who is to say that an academic career is more valid than a strong career in the trades? I really believe that educational institutions have a role to play in the access being more friendly to aboriginal men and women.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lemay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ladies, I am very happy to see you here. I listened carefully to your comments. Could you give the Clerk a copy of the document you read to us?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Roger Préfontaine): We already have one.

Mr. Marc Lemay: In French or in English?

A voice: Yes.

Mr. Marc Lemay: So you read the document that had already been submitted. You didn't make any changes to it? Is it the same thing? I think there have been changes.

[*English*]

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: I can clarify that. The version I gave today was a condensed version, because I was told that I had only ten minutes. I know if I went through the document that was submitted, that would have taken more like 15 minutes. It has been cut down.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Are the conclusions the same?

[*English*]

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Okay. I want to understand something, and you'll see how practical I am. You said that women should design and deliver the curriculum, because it is mostly they who deal with education. According to you, in what proportion are aboriginal women responsible for the education of their children? For example, are they responsible for 98% of it?

[English]

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: That's a pretty difficult question to answer, but I do understand that there are a lot of women-headed households in which the father is not actively involved. I realize that's a very general statement, but I know that compared to the proportion of households headed by women in the rest of Canadian society, the proportion of households headed by women in aboriginal society is much higher. I'm sorry, I do not have that exact percentage, but it's a significant percentage.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Are we to understand that, before even designing and delivering a curriculum, we will need to help single parent women and women in general who deal with their children's education so that they will be able to help their children develop?

• (1605)

[English]

Ms. Karen Schuyler: Yes, I think you're right. At the same time as we are trying to help the children, we have to help the young mothers to come along too. I know they want to help their children learn, and if they can't help their children even with their homework, then they will feel they're not fulfilling their responsibility either. If that could happen at the same time in the same place, that would be ideal.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Suppose we're in an extraordinary world, led by an extraordinary political party, which has not been elected yet.

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): We recognize ourselves.

Mr. Marc Lemay: In this extraordinary world, we have a good curriculum and we help children pursue their education. They complete their high school and college education. Let's go that far. What would these young need to go to university to study medicine, for example? I know the communities badly need doctors and teachers. I wouldn't dare say they need lawyers, because there are too many of us.

Mr. Steven Blaney: They need engineers.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Indeed.

Today, in 2006, what gets in the way of meeting this objective? Do you have an opinion on this?

[English]

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: I'll take a stab at answering that.

I really believe strong role models play a very important role in encouraging young people to reach careers they may not have considered. Also, the feeling has to get out there to aboriginal youth that to be a doctor is possible; that it's not airy-fairy or out in left field somewhere; that it can be done. I'm frustrated that there's so

much communication, whether it's subtle or not so subtle, that "you can't do it; it's way above you."

That triggers another comment I'd like to make, which is that the self-esteem of individual youth has to be increased so that they can believe in themselves and believe in their ability to become doctors and other kinds of professionals, and that they might want to do it. For me as a youngster, that was not in the realm of something I could attain to, and I would like to see that changed with the younger generations.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank you both for coming today before the committee. It's important to have representation from a broad cross-section of organizations that speak on behalf of first nations, Inuit, and Métis, which actually leads to my first question.

There is some confusion around language. When the department presented its aboriginal education plan, they titled it "Aboriginal Education" and they cited throughout the plan statistics about aboriginal peoples. But when they actually got to money, they talked about investment for "first nation" students. My understanding of your organization is that you represent first nations and Métis women both on-reserve, off-reserve, status, and non-status. Is that correct?

The department itself, when it's dealing with education, talks about its jurisdiction in kindergarten to grade 12 as being on-reserve. So it would seem that there is a large gap in what the federal government sees itself as being responsible for. I wonder if that's your experience as well.

• (1610)

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: Yes, it certainly is, because INAC is only involved with registered Indians, people whose names are on the registry. Well, there are many people who have aboriginal descent and may never ever have the hope of getting onto the registry rolls. Or there are some who are in the process of getting onto the registry because of the changes, for example, to Bill C-31. INAC is only involved with the registered Indians, as opposed to the total aboriginal population.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Right now, many of the first nations, Inuit, and Métis women in Canada really have no access to federal government programs; they are reliant on provincial government programs for their access to education, if they do not live on reserve.

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: It actually depends on the particular first nation as well. For example, it depends on the education council or the education department within the first nation—how much money they have and what their political will is to support students not necessarily living on the reserve.

Ms. Jean Crowder: At the end of your presentation, you talked about needing to raise the issue around racialized, sexualized violence against women. Of course, I come from British Columbia, where we have a significant number of aboriginal women, both on the Vancouver east side and on Highway 16, which is being called the "highway of tears". These are mostly aboriginal women, who are either missing or dead.

I noted your talk about the link between poverty and education and, of course, what we loosely call the social determinants of health, about housing, about education, about access to health services.

I notice that when the department has, in the process of developing an education action plan in response to the Auditor General's report in 2004 that talked about the fairly grim state of affairs...when I looked at their plan, I did not see how women were consulted.

I wondered if the Native Women's Association of Canada had been included in the development of this policy and the framework agreement that's coming. Have they been consulted? Have they been included at the table? Has there been outreach done to the communities, either on- or off-reserve, for women specifically?

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: I'm actually fairly new with the Native Women's Association of Canada, but I am the team lead for research and policy for the Sisters in Spirit, which addresses the missing and murdered women, including Vancouver's downtown east side and the highway of tears.

We're just getting off the ground now—entering year two—to start addressing the issues of what communities can do to help the lives of aboriginal women be more safe and to provide some incentive so that when they do leave the reserve.... I mean, young people look around and want the best for themselves. How are they safe? What can we do to guarantee their safety as they go out there looking to see what's good and right for them, and also to have supports for when they come back?

Unfortunately, most reserves don't have that. We're beginning to put together educational tools for different communities that have to do with missing murdered aboriginal women. As far as NWAC's participation, we were at the round table discussions.

Karen, what else do you know about that?

•(1615)

Ms. Karen Schuyler: I don't know of any specific consultations that were done with aboriginal women.

Ms. Jean Crowder: There is a whole series of regional consultations that are currently taking place, and I was concerned about the lack of reference to women and girls in the education action plan. There is no specific gender reference.

The Chair: I think we have to move on now to the government side, Mr. Bruinooge.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Good afternoon, and thanks for coming to the committee today.

I first want to correct some of the information my honourable colleague mistakenly stated. I'm sure he wasn't meaning to mislead or be partisan, but in fact the \$1,200 per child isn't a tax credit but

actually a direct payment. We Conservatives want to get the money out of the hands of government and put it right into the hands of parents, so I'm sure you'll see a lot more benefit. Sure, it's taxable, but all income is.

My question is in relation to something you said about governance and education reform. I think this might be really one of the key points. I think many in the first nations community, Inuit community and aboriginal people in general, tend to want to have control of the education itself.

Which route would you think is your preferred route of accomplishing that? Would it be waiting for a self-government scenario that encompasses all service delivery at the band level, or would you suggest specific education governance set up almost like a school board scenario?

I guess this question particularly relates more to first nations than to the overall aboriginal educational topic.

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: I would suggest that I would say no to any option that involves waiting, because our needs are very urgent. I don't think there's a blanket answer to what you're asking. What will work in one community is not necessarily going to work in another community. It's up to each first nation to decide what will work in the area of education for them.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Perhaps, then, what you're saying is that the self-government model would better accomplish the task you're laying out than trying to negotiate almost a school board scenario.

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: I would say that you should ask the individual communities about that, but I feel that we have waited long enough to have entitlements to education and opportunities to education that other Canadians rather take for granted.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: I would agree with that.

On the topic of Métis education, there's an AHRDA program throughout Canada that's utilized. How, in your experience, have you seen this operate? Has it been successful in the various jurisdictions? I know that in Manitoba it's gone quite well. But what's your experience overall?

Ms. Karen Schuyler: I think it's very successful. However, the dollars are never enough. There is a long waiting list in each of the communities for people to get into training.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: In the post-secondary program, currently there are roughly 25,000 bursaries, I believe, provided to first nations people across Canada. I think that is likely a very low number. Do you have an idea of what the overall need, the requirement, might be? Do you think this number is sufficient?

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: No, I don't think it's sufficient.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Have you seen the benefits, specifically for the education of your female constituents? You mentioned the 5:1 ratio. Do you also see that in the bursary program? Is there a similar 5:1 ratio?

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: I think that when women pursue education, it helps in many different areas. It sets an example for their children, that you can go out and get an education and get a job and go into fields you're suited for and enjoy doing, and that there is something beyond reserve life, which notoriously has a lack of educated people in it, generally speaking. That is one reason I think the number you're stating is very low, because as those children grow up and see the example of their mothers or parents of furthering their educations and living better lives, that says a whole lot. Example, to me, is a very good teacher.

•(1620)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Is there any trade or area of trades in particular that you've seen that perhaps most benefits the aboriginal community? You mentioned that there is a slant in the education system that pushes people towards post-secondary education at the university level, whereas I think everyone here would agree that the typical arts degree doesn't pay even 10% of what a trade can pay these days. Is there a genre of trades, in particular, that you see as something your organization would recommend?

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: In northern Manitoba, in Wuskwatin, for example, there's dam building. I think there are trades there that aboriginal people can certainly be involved with through apprenticeship programs. I understand that this is legislated in Manitoba, and I'm sure it's working pretty well. I'm not sure, but I know there has been a revision in the last couple of years, and I'm not sure to what extent the Manitoba government has followed the recommendations that were made in that study. To answer your question, I think that any of the trades that are relevant to economic development in the area would be a good thing to get into, depending on the preferences of the individuals.

The Chair: We'll move on to Madam Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you both for coming this afternoon.

I have a couple of questions.

In another life I was involved with some access programming in the city of Winnipeg to support women into a whole host of different programs. I'd like to know what supports you see necessary to be in place to assist women, when they go into study and when they go into the workplace. My colleague referenced child care, but my own understanding is that there are other supports as well that are important for them.

You referenced the University of Manitoba access programs. I'm familiar with some of them, not all. Can you give us other examples, in Manitoba or anywhere in the country, of programming for women, particularly post-secondary or skills training—adult education, it needn't be post-secondary necessarily—where it has been particularly successful and made a difference in the lives of women?

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: In Vancouver, there is the Native Education Centre. They have a very strong ABE, adult basic education program. I used to teach there, actually, and I found that most of my students were women.

Some of the things we had as support for them within the centre were culturally appropriate programming and services—for example, parenting skills, healthy relationships, what we would call life

skills, just knowing the community they were living in, how to get around on the buses, how to access the university library, things like that.

I think the fact of aboriginal women getting together, being together, and having an atmosphere and environment of exchanging ideas is very good in supporting each other—a network of support.

•(1625)

Hon. Anita Neville: Is that happening? Are you aware of it happening in places across the country?

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: Yes, I think so, because I think aboriginal people at the post-secondary level tend to come together and get to know each other in ways that perhaps non-aboriginal people don't. But again, the extent of providing a solid network may or may not be there, and those are things that have to be built on.

Hon. Anita Neville: Do you have any information or data on women who upgrade their skills, whether it's high school education or adult basic education, once they achieve some success where they move into post-secondary, professional, trades, or whatever? Have you collected any information on women entering the education stream and then moving on?

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: Actually, for most aboriginal women who get a degree, it's a degree in education. They might become teachers, or they might be in administration. But by far, the field of choice is education.

The Chair: Mr. Albrecht, please.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Thanks to both of you for coming today. I certainly can sense, both in your presentation and in the written material, your passion to see the plight of aboriginal women improved, and I applaud that.

I notice two things. I'll ask two quick questions, and then I want to share my time with Mr. Blaney.

You talk about the representation on school boards in terms of aboriginal people specifically, and then even more so, you point to the number of women serving on those boards. Are there a number of people who wish to serve on these boards and are not able to, for whatever reason, and could you tell me what those reasons are?

Secondly, you say competencies acquired through work should be recognized as well. Are you talking there about some type of apprenticeship system where we would evaluate that? I would be interested in you telling me a little more about that.

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: On the first point regarding the school boards and women, I think aboriginal women would not tend to gravitate towards sitting on a school board. I think we would think that's not really a very friendly place to be, and that our contributions would probably not be valued.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Then I would ask, how could we help address that problem?

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: Well, that's a very deep question. I suggest that the role of aboriginal people in everyday society, if it were increased, would go a long way in addressing that.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Okay, thank you.

On the issue of competency and work programs—

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: There's a prior learning assessment. That is sort of related to what you're talking about, but in different institutions it is more formalized than in others. I feel more work needs to be done in the area to accomplish that.

The Chair: Mr. Blaney, go ahead, please.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Ms. Olsen-Harper, my question is rather general. I would like to know what you think about the quality of the education provided to communities living on-reserve.

•(1630)

[English]

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: Unfortunately, I don't think it's all that great; it needs a lot of improvement, generally speaking. Some reserves are better than others, have a better quality of integrating from the reserve into an urban centre, but many are lagging far behind.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney: How would you compare the training provided to aboriginal people living off-reserve with the one provided on-reserve?

[English]

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: Well, I would say that from a reserve perspective, you would not have a post-secondary education available to you. In fact, in many reserves, high school itself would not be available to youngsters.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney: So it's mostly the elementary level. How does your association believe the quality of education could be improved on reserves? I think this is a major challenge.

[English]

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: I think that somehow the peer pressure to want to be in school and to do fun, nice things in those grades would go a long way. You need really creative, intuitive instructors or teachers who are child friendly, who love children, to help propel that peer pressure to go the other way, instead of it being a drudgery, and a bore, and “Why do we have to do that?”

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney: You will maybe value education. You spoke of trades and, I believe, a rather practical orientation. This could be a way of improving the quality of education on reserves and motivating people. Is this what you're saying?

[English]

The Chair: Can you just answer yes or no? We're out of time.

Ms. Anita Olsen-Harper: Okay, I'll say yes, but it has to be culturally appropriate and view the culture in a very positive light and encourage it.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay, good answer.

What is the pleasure of the committee now? We can run over, because the witnesses were held up at no fault of their own. Have you exhausted your questions? Can we move on to the next witnesses? What is the pleasure?

Hon. Anita Neville: We can move on.

The Chair: Mr. Lévesque? Okay, we'll move on.

Thank you very much for your submission. We really do appreciate your taking the time this afternoon to meet with us.

•(1635)

The Chair: Could we come to order, please?

Members, we have our next witnesses. From the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, we have Patrick Brazeau, national chief, and Jerry Peltier, consultant.

Welcome to the committee.

The procedure will be for you to make a presentation, if you would, please, for 10 minutes or close to that. We'll then be forwarding some questions to you.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Patrick Brazeau (National Chief, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples): Very well. Thank you very much.

Before I get to the presentation, I'd like to say that, unfortunately, we only had English copies made because of a lack of resources for translation. I'm told that they will be on your desks in a couple of days.

Mr. Chairman, let me first thank you and the committee.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Speak slowly, please.

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: Let me thank you and the committee for the decision to provide an early focus in this Parliament on aboriginal education. I know that it's a priority of the new government and a great concern for all aboriginal leaders, all of our organizations, and all of our communities.

We don't have a lot of time today, so I want to try to focus on key issues and questions to prompt the start of a new dialogue between us, as aboriginal representatives and as representatives of Canada's formal political structure of government. Before I do that, I have a quick word about the congress, our mandate, and our constituency.

Some of you may hold the view that real first nations people have status cards, belong to Indian Act bands, and are represented by the Assembly of First Nations. This is simply wrong. The congress represents the interests of as many, and perhaps more, first nations people across the country as are able to vote for the people who vote for the AFN's national chief.

Both the AFN and the congress share this constituency. I wish we were more forthright and cooperative in this shared obligation. We respect the AFN's mandate and task, and we merely ask you to respect ours. I invite any of you who have questions about this to address this matter simply and straightforwardly today. Then we can move on to the substance of education.

Some of you may also take the view that the only real Métis in Canada are part of the Métis nation, which is based on the prairies and affiliated with the Métis National Council. Again, that is simply unfounded. The congress includes elected representatives of Métis communities and people in Labrador, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, and B.C. We have a protocol with the only land-based Métis in the country, which is in Alberta.

I also invite you to refer to the documentation we have provided as attachments to these speaking notes. They provide an overview of aboriginal peoples, including our constituency. This may also give you a better understanding of the sometimes blunt and subtle distinctions, differences, and boundaries separating aboriginal peoples, even when they are members of the same family.

This may also help you to understand why approaches to aboriginal education now in place are fundamentally flawed. The attachments also provide a wide range of analysis and the recommendations on aboriginal education issues, from pre-K to post-secondary, and lifelong learning. I will return to the highlights of those recommendations in the course of setting what I regard as the key questions this committee should be addressing.

First, it is important to recall our vision. You have heard from other submissions, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, and from numerous studies and reports how all aboriginal people regard education as part of a life-learning and holistic experience that embraces all strands of our existence—not only for K to 12 and post-secondary, but from infancy to old age; not only for scientific or western economic goals, but also for traditional values, spiritual growth, cultural and linguistic survival; and not just one for one type of aboriginal person or group defined arbitrarily by outside criteria, but for all our peoples.

This holistic stance is of no less importance to aboriginal people in urban, rural, and remote areas living off-reserve than for those living within reserve boundaries or in the far north. They are often of even greater importance, since there are few defences against the twin onslaughts of modern Canadian society: assimilation and discrimination.

Let's be honest. Outside of a few off-reserve schools controlled by aboriginal education boards, such as in Winnipeg, the accommodations made for aboriginal students in urban or rural areas are minimal at best, often token, and even more, often entirely absent. So our vision of holistic education, first and foremost, is based on the need to treat our people, our nations, and communities as what they really

are, which is part of this country's founding peoples, no less essential to respect and support than the other two founding nations.

Our vision does not pretend that status under the Indian Act makes a difference to educational need, because it does so only indirectly, and in a negative way. Our vision is not to pretend that provinces can, or will, embrace or respond effectively to aboriginal principles about cultural and community education and learning, at least not without clear, strong federal involvement, leadership, and funding—because they won't.

Finally, our vision is to work with you, as parliamentarians, to move Canada to the point where our future as aboriginal peoples is secure, not just economically but spiritually, culturally, and communally. In order to achieve those ends, we have made a variety of specific recommendations.

• (1640)

We recommend a national aboriginal centre for education and training. All aboriginal students, from preschool to adult training, need a national integrated support institution to assist communities, schools, universities, and skills development delivery agencies to provide the best lifelong education possible.

A national centre that bridges the existing divides between preschool, K to 12, post-secondary, and adult training is needed, which is status and residency blind.

We recommend special assistance funding for post-secondary education. Métis and first nations people off-reserve have little or no access to the Department of Indian Affairs \$300 million funding for post-secondary support program. Provinces do not support an alternative, and the only resort is hard-pressed, community-funded scholarships. The discrimination must end.

A national assistance fund for off-reserve first nations and Métis people should be introduced, with unconditional federal investment and inducements for provincial, territorial, private, and non-profit sector contributions.

We recommend clear targets for first nations and Métis off-reserve. Educational attainment reaching national standards must be set, and funding should be tied to making those targets achievable.

We recommend equity and skills development and labour market training. Access to skills development is very uneven in this country, especially for non-reserve first nations and Métis peoples outside the prairies. All national aboriginal groups have to be equal partners and decision-makers in accountable programs for adult training. This principle has been upheld by the Federal Court but continues to be largely ignored by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

We recommend delinking politics from educational expertise. A new balance is needed between expertise in education and training and in accountability to the communities. Too many decisions affecting education and training are being taken for short-term political reasons. Favouritism is all too common. Educational and training authorities are needed that allow communities, through their leaders, to set broad directions and budgets without interfering in areas of expertise or disrupting merit or needs-based access to support programs.

Key questions for this committee. These recommendations highlight where we want to go, but to get there we have to address some core policy questions, questions that go way beyond tinkering with existing program guidelines or funding formulas.

In closing, I would put three questions to this committee. First, I would ask you to frame a statement on what the committee regards as its fiduciary duty and obligations to aboriginal peoples in relation to education and lifelong learning.

Parliament holds its own share of the Crown's broader fiduciary relationship with aboriginal peoples, but simply acknowledging a vague fiduciary duty is of little practical help in judging the merits and directions of proposed legislative or program-based measures. A clear and precise assertion of Parliament's unique obligations would be far more useful.

Secondly, I would invite the committee to investigate the situation of discrimination in federal education programs for aboriginal peoples, and by that, I mean discrimination on the grounds of arbitrary and irrelevant criteria such as status under the Indian Act. I think you will unearth, as we have, that such discrimination is very much at the core of the sad and unacceptable failure of current educational social policies, whether federal or provincial.

Finally, the committee should ask itself and fully debate the role that aboriginal governments and democratic accountability to all those involved can and must play in improving the outcomes we all want to witness.

For the congress, the time has come to end ineffective and arbitrary forms of aboriginal governance. There are church library committees that have more effective accountability and capacity. The time has come to get serious about recognizing aboriginal educational authorities and ensuring they are accountable in a comprehensive way.

Merci, and thank you.

•(1645)

The Chair: Thank you, National Chief Brazeau.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. I just noticed copies of his speech are being

distributed to some members and not all. I thought we had a very clear policy, and I know the ITK witness was not allowed to distributed any copies of his presentation because they were only in English.

The Chair: I didn't see that happening.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell: I see quite a few copies here, and one of the staff was just distributing them, totally against the rules of the committee.

I ask that you make it universal in our judgment, Chair.

The Chair: Could I have those turned in until we have them all brought forward in both official languages. Thank you. That was an oversight on the part of the chair.

Okay, we're going to move on to the opportunity to question our presenters. The first opportunity is for the Liberal side.

Who is going to take that on?

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you. I will, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Chief Brazeau, for coming today.

I'm mulling over how to proceed. Let me first of all thank you for acknowledging the two aboriginal schools in the city of Winnipeg. I was intimately involved in establishing them. While they've had their challenges, they're certainly addressing some of the needs of some of the children in the city of Winnipeg.

As I listen to you, I'm not clear in my own mind what you're saying. You made a number of very strident political points in terms of what we should strive for. But what I'm really muddled about when I'm listening to you is that I don't understand what you're asking for in terms of governance and jurisdiction as it relates to the education of aboriginal children. I really would welcome some clarity.

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: Thank you for your question.

With respect to obligations in terms of the off-reserve population in this country, it has always been the struggle that the federal government has jurisdiction for status Indians living on-reserve only, yet when one moves off the reserve, they're deemed to become under provincial jurisdiction. But when one goes to the provincial governments for assistance, for example, one gets juggled back to the federal government.

So what happens with respect to the off-reserve population in this country—not only with respect to education but in a wide variety of issues—is that they fall between the cracks. Our position is that we know the federal government has funding for education. We know provincial governments have funding for education. So I think it's time that we be honest with ourselves in terms of who does what, how we can start a dialogue amongst ourselves, to ensure that we align what's already being spent. It's not a question of more money being put in the system, but how we best utilize those resources so that the people with real needs across this country have access to some of the dollars that are meant to address those issues.

●(1650)

Hon. Anita Neville: I need further information. I'm very familiar with the Winnipeg experience and I'm very familiar with the education of aboriginal children in the city of Winnipeg. It is, you're right, for the most part picked up by the provincial government, with some moneys coming in for children from first nations communities, where they don't have high schools, and the transfers of funds are made to the urban jurisdiction.

How would you propose aligning that? That's what I'm missing. It's one thing to say it needs to be aligned. We all know the BNA Act. We all know that education is a provincial responsibility. We all know that first nations education is a federal responsibility. It's one thing to say it, but what kind of proposals are you putting forward?

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: I guess the first step would be to begin a dialogue between federal, provincial, and aboriginal organizations with respect to how we utilize the funds to do the best with those funds. I'm very cognizant of this, that we should all respect the Constitution, but at the same time, we have to be real with ourselves in recognizing that the Constitution is also providing a lot of problems with respect to the aboriginal population in this country in terms of who is responsible for what.

So the first step is to sit down together and begin those discussions to ensure that the people who have needs actually get access to funding to try to address those issues. I think if we were to be able to sit down and start those discussions, then we could come up with a variety of solutions. Yet again, I don't think I'm here today to provide some of those solutions, without having sat down with provincial and federal representatives on this particular issue, knowing that there'll be differences of opinion and different areas in which people will want to go. But at least it would initiate a first step into how we go about addressing this problem.

Hon. Anita Neville: Have you had these discussions with other aboriginal organizations in the country?

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: I'm not sure. What exactly do you mean by “other”, the national organizations?

Hon. Anita Neville: Other national organizations: the AFN, NWAC, the Inuit organizations. Have you had any discussions of your desire to basically reform in a very dramatic way the whole funding process of education for aboriginal children in the country?

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: Absolutely. Leading up, for example, to the Kelowna meeting of last November, we had a series of meetings with the Native Women's Association of Canada, not just on education but on wide variety of issues, which led to a protocol

agreement signed between the congress and NWAC a month and a half ago.

Hon. Anita Neville: And were the discussions specific?

What you are proposing is a very radical solution or a very radical approach to education of children. Have you begun a discussion with other potential partners to see if there's an interest? That's what I'm asking.

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: Absolutely. We've begun a series of discussions with different groups across the country. As a matter of fact, it's not just on education, but the message we're trying to convey and getting others on board into conveying that message....

Let's take post-secondary education, for example. We all know that the funding that's made available by the federal government is only available to status Indians who live on-reserve and, to a lesser extent, to status Indians who live off-reserve. But what about the non-status population in this country who cannot access some of those moneys because they don't hold a discretionary status card?

I'm fully aware, on that point, that I myself, as a status Indian who has lived both on- and off-reserve, was lucky enough to be able to access post-secondary education funding. But then again, there are also members of my own family who could not. Those are things we're trying to address, which is why we have undertaken a series of meetings to try to stress that message.

●(1655)

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. We're going to move on now to Mr. Lévesque, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Gentlemen, welcome.

Does the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples represent aboriginal people on and off reserves? We know that those who live on-reserve are registered Indians. Among those who live off-reserve, a few are registered and others are not.

What structure do you see for people living off-reserve? How do you reach them? You recommend a national aboriginal centre. What do you mean by “national”? Would it be for all first nations across Canada?

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: Thank you for your questions.

First, I'd like to clarify something. You talked about aboriginal people living on and off-reserve. It should be known that 51% of aboriginal people in Canada live off-reserve. We defend the rights and interests of aboriginal people living off-reserve, whether they be Métis or first nation people.

As for the national centre, it would be a centre for all of Canada, for all aboriginal people, including first nations, Métis and Inuit. It would be similar to the National First Nations Governance Centre, which was established a few years ago. All aboriginal people of Canada have access to the centre for expertise, information, etc.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Do you recommend that the money from the provinces and the federal government be transferred to the national centre, which would then decide how much to give to aboriginal people living off-reserve or in an urban environment? If this were the case, how would you determine who gets the money, because you said there were registered and non-registered members?

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: I believe the definition of the different peoples in Canada already exists. However, the perception or understanding of people may be lacking. We try to educate people with respect to the terms and statistics I addressed earlier.

We believe the centre should be set up so as to have different representatives of the federal and provincial governments, as well as representatives of the five recognized national aboriginal organizations.

As for knowing who has access to what, who can get the money transferred to the centre, it would be up to a group or committee comprised of all the partners to determine these criteria and reach a consensus on this.

• (1700)

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Brazeau, how can the members of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples be identified? Back home, in Rouyn-Noranda, there are off-reserve aboriginal people who have access to the Quebec provincial school system. How can I help them?

I apologize for painting such a nasty and mean picture. It's easy when a person lives on a reserve, because you know where they are and you can help the Inuit people or communities. But how can you help people living in Rouyn-Noranda if they have access to the Quebec school system?

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: Allow me to clarify the structure of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples. We are the national organization, and we have provincial affiliated organizations. Most members across Canada are familiar with the existence of our provincial organizations.

I won't talk about the financial capacity of these organizations, because it's very minimal. These organizations are present in the provinces, and they provide similar programs and services in terms of education.

In Quebec, our recognized organization is the Alliance autochtone du Québec, which was established 35 years ago, which provides scholarships to aboriginal students living off-reserve, etc.

Second—I didn't want to address this issue, but it's very important—, there is financing. For every \$8 spent by the federal

government on-reserve, they only spend \$1 off-reserve. How can we achieve a balance to enable everybody to have access to certain programs and services?

Mr. Marc Lemay: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. Madam Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your presentation today.

I have to come back to the jurisdictional piece, because it would be extremely troubling. In my province of British Columbia, there are significant numbers of aboriginal students in provincial schools. In one of the schools in my riding, a primary school, almost 60% of the students are aboriginal. So we have a clear provincial jurisdiction over education for off-reserve children.

In the past, where the federal government has funnelled funds for particular initiatives, whether they're aboriginal or non-aboriginal, provinces have strongly resisted any accountability measures. We can go back to the agreements in 2001 and so on, and there were two separate child care agreements that, in my province, resulted in child care spaces being cut even though the federal funds were supposed to create child care spaces. I understand that some of the housing money that has recently come, in theory, for off-reserve aboriginal peoples is going to be used to build houses for non-aboriginal people.

So when you're talking jurisdictional issues, I know this is a problem that even constitutional experts can't come up with solutions to, but I think a simplistic solution that says we'll just get the federal, provincial, and aboriginal organizations to get together and have a conversation about this isn't going to wash. We need something more concrete. If you want the federal government to start mucking around in provincial government territory on education, I think you need to provide us with something more in that respect.

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: On that point, it might have been my lack of clarity on the issue, but what I was foreseeing was that if there were to be any federal transfers of money to the provinces for education, what we would like to see and need to see for the benefit of the off-reserve population in this country is to ensure accountability measures are structured into those transfers, one, so those moneys are indeed spent on education issues and not for any other reason, and two, to ensure that our provincial affiliates across the country are fully engaged in discussions as to how the money will be spent and how the programs will be implemented.

This has been a lifelong learning experience for us in that our provincial affiliates, who are the experts in service delivery, among a wide variety of other experts, are excluded. Our message has always been a question of inclusiveness.

●(1705)

Ms. Jean Crowder: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]...and have the provinces report on it. I think it's appalling that provinces get funds and they're not accountable to the federal government and the taxpayer. There are any number of examples of agreements where that doesn't happen.

I want to come back to the aboriginal educational plan—I'm waving these documents around a lot today. Have you been consulted? Have you been involved in this at all? Nobody's picked up a phone and said, "What do you think about aboriginal education in Canada?"

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: No, no.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Minister Prentice, in his presentation to the committee on May 31, said that since taking office he has met with representatives of organizations across the country to discuss ways of improving the quality of education in aboriginal communities. Are you one of the organizations that have been consulted by Minister Prentice?

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: Just before my colleague answers, we did meet with Minister Prentice and we touched upon education, but I guess the priority was more along the lines of other discussions we had.

Mr. Jerry Peltier (Consultant, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples): Just to add, Madam Crowder, that's one of the things the congress and the federal government are reviewing with the minister, Mr. Prentice, in his role as interlocutor. How many roles, responsibilities, and powers does the minister have in that jurisdiction?

So leading up to the previous meetings, leading up to Kelowna, as you probably know, there seemed to be an indication that only three national organizations were being consulted, and two were being left out of those discussions: the Native Women's Association of Canada and the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples. From what we see, they're going to be included now, and the new minister is reaching out to all aboriginal groups to sit down—

Ms. Jean Crowder: I understand the national friendship association wasn't included either.

Mr. Jerry Peltier: That's right. So now that they're reaching out to us, hopefully there will be more discussions and consultations on these important issues.

The Chair: On the government side, Mr. Bruinooge.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank both of you for coming today. I would suggest that when it is suggested to you that some of your visionary ideas about reform and change are perhaps radical, then maybe you're going in the right direction. I wouldn't suggest changing your vision in any regard.

I just wanted to ask you about some of the sentiments you expressed in relation to the first ministers meeting of last year. You were on the record as saying you were very supportive of the targets but wanted to see more funds flowing off-reserve, which is similar to your statements today.

Perhaps I could get you to just expand a bit on your overall logic as to why you think that is necessary in this modern context that we live in.

●(1710)

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: Thank you very much for your comment and question.

On the comment, I have never been shy about being called a radical or not. As a young leader—the youngest leader in this country, national-wise anyway—I can say it's time for change. I'm personally sick and tired of the rhetoric. Let's start doing instead of talking. I think there's been enough talk.

Secondly, with respect to Kelowna, yes, we were there in Kelowna as one of five federally recognized national aboriginal organizations. Of course we support the targets that flowed from the discussions in Kelowna. Yet, leaving Kelowna back in November, we were a bit perplexed, because on the second day, when we got a copy of how the moneys were going to flow, we had the \$5.1 billion tag on it.

It's always been our position that, first of all, this was never voted in by Parliament, so in our view it's still an imaginary figure. Secondly, it's not just a question of throwing money at problems to solve them; it's to have cooperation between different levels of government and within our own aboriginal organizations as well.

But the fact of the matter still remained that after an 18-month process, most of the funding was going to be geared towards status Indians who lived on-reserve. I have no issue with that, because there are some serious problems in the reserves. We also have been advocates to eliminate the Indian Act, but I think that's another discussion. But if you're going to target a problem, you have to target the problem from all angles.

One example is that if you have a physical abuse situation between a man and a woman, what do you do? Do you give resources to the man to get counselling, or do you give the woman resources to get counselling? If you do either one or the other, you're not going to solve the problem, because somebody is being left out. But if you provide resources for both to get counselling, then you make a strong attempt at solving the problem.

It's the same thing with Kelowna. If you're going to target aboriginal poverty, you can't just target people who live on-reserve. You have to target the majority of the aboriginal population, who now reside off-reserve. Seventy-nine percent of the total aboriginal population in this country reside off-reserve. As I mentioned earlier, 51% of status Indians also reside off-reserve. These are not our numbers; these are numbers from Statistics Canada.

That's why we were a bit baffled when we left Kelowna. I mean, sure we want to target poverty, but let's let everybody have a chance at getting the resources that are there to try to solve their problems.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Thanks.

I'm going to pass it along to my colleague.

The Chair: Monsieur Blaney.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney: Hello.

I think your statement was clear enough.

I'd like to come back to the earlier example of the aboriginal student living in an aboriginal community. How can you help that student?

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: Thank you for your question.

First, as I indicated, we have provincial affiliated organizations across Canada, which are themselves comprised of off-reserve communities. The smaller communities scattered across the province form an aboriginal group. There can be registered, non-registered or Métis members.

We help these people by lobbying the governments, particularly the federal government. At the provincial level, we can assist the provincial affiliates when they request our help, not only in terms of education but for any issue involving aboriginal peoples.

We are responsible for delivering the message and telling the story. All aboriginal people don't live on reserves. Those who have problems don't all live on reserves. This has always been a matter of federal-provincial jurisdiction as to who will provide assistance to our organization and provincial affiliates.

• (1715)

Mr. Steven Blaney: It is indicated in the Parliament Library notes that you published a report in 2004 in which you indicated that there are more and more off-reserve aboriginal people who complete high school. In 2001, the rate was 48%...

[*English*]

The Chair: We don't have time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney: Okay.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Merasty, we're in the five-minute round, so be concise with your questions, please.

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

Thanks for your presentation, Mr. Brazeau.

I think one of the things that we've been getting a conflicting message on was when we had the Indian affairs department talking about population at one of our previous committee meetings. For example, 60% are on-reserve and the trend is growing upward. Secondly, on post-secondary funding off-reserve, it's my understanding that, at least in Saskatchewan and in certain other regions as well, a lot of on-reserve post-secondary funding programs actually fund regardless of residence. I know that has happened. There is off-reserve post-secondary funding. Is there enough? No, there's not. I

agree with you on that point. Do we need improved mechanisms to do that? Absolutely.

I'm glad you clarified that all five national organizations were in Kelowna.

In regard to the money, at a finance committee meeting, a senior federal official said the money was there. Unfortunately, the government decided to go a different route.

One of the big issues is with respect to moving forward. I agree that what you're talking about is interesting. I'm probably one of those guys who would like to see some radical change. How do we get over some hurdles today when we need to address the realities of the students today? There's a pressing need.

The Métis in Saskatchewan say they represent all the Métis, regardless of residence on-reserve or off-reserve. The first nations in Saskatchewan say the same thing. What is your view on the portability of treaty rights in that context? How would you attempt to reconcile the relationship?

Unfortunately, I'm giving more of a Saskatchewan context than anything else. You didn't mention Saskatchewan before on organizations regionally.

How would you begin to reconcile it in time to address some of the day-to-day issues that we have right now?

Mr. Jerry Peltier: Mr. Chairman, can I take a stab at that, if I may?

The Chair: Certainly.

Mr. Jerry Peltier: I think there's been a good start. Last week the collective work of all parties in unanimously passing the budget was a good start. We're now going to see some money start flowing to off-reserve Indians.

Mr. Gary Merasty: I wasn't there, but I heard it passed.

Ms. Jean Crowder: He didn't endorse it.

Mr. Jerry Peltier: I think the position we're taking is that yes, those rights are portable; they're just not confined to a first nation territory.

When the officials appeared before this committee back in June, when we monitored their presentations to you, I think there was a good start there. I want to quote what Mr. LeBlanc said:

INAC, through the federal interlocutor, works with aboriginal organizations, as well as with provincial governments where appropriate, to find practical solutions to improve the life chances of Métis, non-status Indians, and urban aboriginal peoples....

We want to follow up on that with those officials. We want to see how they're going to be reporting back to you.

As I said, those are two big steps. We're going to see money flowing, hopefully, because the budget's been passed, and then we're going to see the interlocutor's office taking more of a proactive approach in dealing with these issues. We're going to be working with them very closely on that.

• (1720)

Mr. Gary Merasty: The issue is that this year's budget of \$150 million will not go very far to begin to address some of the housing and educational issues that are definitely out there. Unfortunately, I didn't see anything for Métis in the budget, so I'm very concerned that none of these initiatives you talk about will even get off the ground. I don't see a vehicle through which that will happen.

Have you made requests to this government to significantly increase funding to achieve what you'd like to see and what you're described, or are you pleased with what I described with the funding situation this year?

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: With respect to the funding situation this year, we are pleased because it's at least a first step into recognizing the constituency for whom we advocate.

As to whether we've had any discussions about increasing the federal off-reserve funding, we have, absolutely. In fact, during the campaign we asked this government a series of 10 questions, basically, and the response they provided was that they will be conducting a full review of INAC spending to have a more equitable distribution of funding for people on and off reserve. We have had these discussions with Minister Prentice already.

With reference to your earlier comment about not mentioning any Saskatchewan affiliates of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, you've done your homework; currently we do not have any affiliates in the province of Saskatchewan. That is because a few years ago—I don't want to get into details—we did run into unaccountable organizations, and I, as a young leader, do not support any such organizations. I think you can surely sympathize with the lack of accountability and some of the discussions out there with respect to aboriginal people and not being accountable, which in some cases is the case and in others is not.

We're looking at having serious discussions with groups out there currently who want to affiliate themselves with the congress, some because they feel they are not represented by the AFN and some because they feel they are not represented by MNC, and that's been the mandate of our organization. The way to get past that—unfortunately, I don't see it happening, but we're still trying—is to try to work with other organizations and not let it be a jurisdictional question. It's a matter of people, and that's why we're here—for the people.

The Chair: Thank you.

You have one more question from the government side.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I would like to follow up on a previous question, then, as it relates to the first ministers conference. We agree that we support the objectives and targets. If we can focus today on the educational aspect of it, what good things from that conference can we take and move forward on, as they relate to education?

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: I don't have the figures in front of me, but a nominal amount was earmarked for education. In terms of the

language or of interpretation with respect to the language, we didn't see any benefits, or very few benefits, for the off-reserve population.

Having said that, maybe I digress. There was some money earmarked for off-reserve use, but was it enough? Absolutely not. More importantly, what's important, to be specific and answer your question, is to ensure that our affiliates across the country, in relation to any moneys—not just for education but for any wide array of issues—are full partners in how any future programs will be implemented to ensure that they actually benefit the people with real needs.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Blaney.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A moment ago, I was going to say that between 1996 and 2001, the percentage of students having completed high school rose by 4%. Here we're talking about aboriginal students living off-reserve. So it seems the situation is improving.

You talked about assimilation. I'd like to know how you see your mandate in terms of the integration of aboriginal people living off-reserve into the education system. Is this integration complementary in your view? Also, how do you think you can help them? Do you want them out of the curriculum, or do you intend to create schools for off-reserve aboriginal people?

• (1725)

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: Thank you for your question.

First, according to statistics, it's true that more and more aboriginal people complete high school and post-secondary studies. However, there is a reality that statistics don't show: more aboriginal people move to urban centres to study, and as a consequence, there are more requests for financing.

Second, you talked about the integration of aboriginal people in schools. Those who live off-reserve are integrated into the provincial school systems where, unfortunately, the curriculum does not include awareness to their culture, although this was laid down by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996.

We want to look at how we can develop a curriculum for aboriginal people in urban centres, how we can involve aboriginal people in the implementation of curricula, and how we can attract aboriginal teachers, who will be more sensitive to aboriginal people and issues once they are integrated into the provincial system.

Mr. Steven Blaney: So it's complementary. You don't necessarily want to create...

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm going to end questions now. We're out of time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney: Do you want to have separate entities, or would you rather integrate or enhance existing curricula?

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: Given the jurisdictions...

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm going to end questions now. That's it. We've run out of time.

I want to thank the witnesses, National Chief Brazeau and Mr. Peltier. Thank you very much for appearing and being very informative to the committee on some of the challenges that we'll face in the future as we try to recommend good policy to our minister and the department.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: You're welcome. Thank you.

The Chair: Committee members, we haven't had a subcommittee meeting and we have to deal with some issues with regard to possible witnesses for Wednesday.

I have one possible witness, and it's only at the pleasure of this committee, and that's the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada. They would be prepared to be a witness for half of the meeting. For the other half of the meeting, maybe we could deal with focusing on our priorities as far as education is concerned and looking at the list of witnesses and going through that. Would that be acceptable?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Anita Neville: Yes, that's fine.

The Chair: Then that's what we shall do.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Chair, I apologize. We neglected to submit our list. We will do that and give it to the clerk within the next day.

The Chair: Thank you.

This meeting is adjourned.

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