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Mr. Colin Mayes

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• (1535)

[English]

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

Committee members, you have the orders of the day. As you can see here, for the first hour, between 3:30 and 4:30, we have a witness, Mr. Peter Dinsdale, executive director of the National Association of Friendship Centres. Then, from 4:30 to 5:30, we will go in camera and we will be dealing with committee business, in particular the planning of future business.

I just want to make a statement that on behalf of the committee I did table the support of the United Nations resolution with regard to aboriginal people. I did that at the session today.

I want to mention that we had a bit of a problem at the last meeting. There were documents circulated that were in English only—in one official language. I want to remind all members that we need to have documents in both official languages before they are circulated. I just want to make sure that we follow that rule.

I want to thank Mr. Peter Dinsdale for appearing today. It was on short notice. We really do appreciate you moving your schedule to allow you to be here.

We do have the submission in both official languages for the committee members. Thank you.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Albrecht.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I understand that recently we've had short notice for the witnesses we've called. I understand the logistical problems that creates in terms of getting information and briefing notes to us. But I would ask that in the future, if it's possible, to try to have briefing notes to us prior to the day of the meeting. It makes it very difficult for us to be properly informed. If we could make a note of that, I'd appreciate it.

The Chair: Note taken, Mr. Albrecht. I think that's a reasonable request. Once we meet and fix our witness schedule, it will be a lot easier for us to make that available. Thank you for that.

Mr. Dinsdale, we'll commence with your presentation, and then, as I mentioned, we'll be asking questions for an hour of our committee time this afternoon.

Once again, thank you for appearing.

Mr. Peter Dinsdale (Executive Director, National Association of Friendship Centres): I'd like to thank the committee very much for the opportunity to come to speak with you today and share some of our perspectives on aboriginal education. The clerk informed me that you're focusing particularly on post-secondary education, and we'll try to guide our comments towards that outcome, but certainly we share a perspective that education includes a broader field for consideration.

I'd like to start with a very brief summary—I know I have around ten minutes to speak here—about who we are and about our structure.

Page 6 has a map, showing where the friendship centres are located across the country. Hopefully, there's one in each of your ridings: if not, let's talk afterwards, and we'll try to get one. The only province or territory we aren't currently involved in is P.E.I. Charlottetown in P.E.I. is doing a lot of work towards the development of a centre in that community.

Friendship centres are service delivery organizations in communities across Canada. There are currently 117 from coast to coast to coast. Our mandate is primarily to administer the aboriginal friendship centre program on behalf of the federal government, but in doing that we touch all of Canada's aboriginal peoples—first nation, Métis, and Inuit—irrespective of political or legal definitions, through really basic bread-and-butter services every day.

We are very much community-driven. We provide funding to local friendship centres and support to their boards. We establish administration standards for those friendship centres, in the level and type of administration they need to provide. We also provide some other programs on behalf of government partners.

With respect to our process, I'm from the National Association of Friendship Centres. We're really at the bottom of the pyramid, which includes—in the last year we collected full stats—757,000 client contacts across the country through 117 friendship centres. We have seven regional bodies, and we're the national body. We also have a national senate and a youth council to support our activities as well.

I won't spend too much time on the stats—I'm sure you know them better than I do—but according to the 2001 census, 71% of all aboriginal people live off of reserves, and 68% of that population live in urban areas. That's a fancy way of saying just about 50% of all aboriginal people live in urban areas.

We know from the same stats that the urban population is growing: in some cities it has quadrupled. In other areas it's going to continue to grow over the next 25 years. Fifty percent of the population is under the age of 25. And with your focus on education, of course you know that 50% of all aboriginal people do not graduate from high school.

So what in effect we have is a growing underclass in this country of young, urban, uneducated aboriginal people. Unless we do something this generation with the issue, it's only going to grow.

As I said, currently there are 117 friendship centres across the country. These community agencies and the program that funds them really are enablers for many other programs that we can provide on behalf of the federal government—we have some examples there for you. It's important to note that in addition to every dollar we receive in core funding, we receive on average approximately \$9 from other government programs. So our program isn't funded solely through the aboriginal friendship centre program. We certainly do a lot of other things through other federal and various provincial and municipal programs.

Naturally, friendship centres offer that first point of contact, a welcoming environment, and access to a broader community. I won't get into the list of programs and services that friendship centres provide, but it's varied. We like to say we try to provide a cradle-to-grave kind of programming cycle, everything from prenatal to early learning and child care programming, to programming to young people in communities, for those who have dropped out of school, to programming for adults who run into difficulties in their lives, through various education programs, to drug and alcohol counselling, to homelessness programming outreach, to support for our seniors, all in a culturally appropriate manner.

Friendship centres started in the early 1950s as aboriginal people began to migrate into urban areas for a variety of reasons. There's a brief history there outlining our growth, and where we are today with the 117 centres across the country.

As you know, with respect to off-reserve education issues, half of our people are not graduating right now, for a variety of reasons. The reasons cited for non-completion of post-secondary studies for men were primarily financial, while those for women, most frequently cited of late, were related to family responsibilities. While some post-secondary outcomes show signs of improvement, the percentage of non-reserve aboriginal people with post-secondary education is significantly lower than the same for the total Canadian population.

Friendship centres are involved in education in a variety of formats. I briefly referred to the cradle-to-grave notion. We're involved in early childhood education through a variety of programs like aboriginal head start programs and community action plan for children programs. We're involved in various adult literacy and upgrading programs, and we provide scholarships.

● (1540)

At the National Association of Friendship Centres we named a scholarship after one of our senators, Delia Gray. Youth are involved in the friendship centre and some funding helps their post-secondary studies.

We have a number of alternative schools across the country; we have eight in Ontario right now and a couple of others sprinkled throughout the country. These are initiatives aimed at giving aboriginal people who have already dropped out of school an opportunity to get back into education and finish school. Some of the most interesting programs are not just in friendship centres. There are a couple of exciting schools in Winnipeg. In Toronto there's one involved with the friendship centre movement. There's a growing groundswell of on-the-ground community education programs and that needs to be supported.

We're involved in other types of programs related to education, like computer training and aboriginal language—too often when we talk about education we forget about our own cultures and our own communities. We're involved in a variety of cultural supports associated with that as well.

In general, urban aboriginal education programs have taken a very much first nations status Indian approach, much in keeping with the federal government's responsibilities. The current policy environment has very much focused on a distinction-based approach, most recently reflected in the Kelowna accords. During the negotiations for the Kelowna accords we were concerned about how the urban aboriginal issue was being dealt with in that context. The creation of first nation school boards, while important and supportive, isn't going to help a single aboriginal woman in downtown Winnipeg finish school or help her child get into an early learning program so ultimately that child can go to post-secondary education. So we were calling for an expansion within that context, within the targets, of how to reach that urban population through creative measures like alternative schools.

We believe a specific urban approach is required, while not shying away from previous commitments because we do believe those commitments under the Kelowna accord need to be met. And programs must help that mythical single aboriginal woman in a downtown community if they're to have impact.

As we mentioned, with respect to post-secondary education, it's one piece in a larger continuum that needs to be addressed. We have early learning programs so our young people have successful starts. We have K to 12 programming for those who are having problems in mainstream schools. We have alternative schools for those who have dropped out, so they will have other ways to get back into the public education system. We need literacy programs to help those adults who already have not made it and are looking for opportunities to get back into school.

If you look at early learning and child care, more than 112,000 children under the age of six are living off reserve, and 16% of six-year-old aboriginal children living off reserve had attended a pre-school program. That's certainly not the kind of access we need to make sure these kids are getting the start they need. According to the 2001 aboriginal peoples survey, 42% of six-year-old aboriginal children living off reserve had not attended pre-school at all.

We need an early learning and child care program that's based on successful community-based initiatives from every region of the country. We need to take an approach that ensures direct service delivery to urban aboriginal people—an approach that doesn't make them have to be a status Indian, belong to a certain Métis community, or come from certain regions of the country. We call that a status-blind approach. We need to target specific needs of aboriginal children living in communities as opposed to blanket programs across the country.

We're calling for various constituent early learning and child care programs offered in centres across Canada to be included in the national early learning and child care programming notions thought of in the previous government.

There are a variety of actions we can take for the K to 12 programs as well. It's clear we need better engagement with provinces and territories around this issue because the jurisdictional land mine that is an urban aboriginal person continues to pervade. But any serious examination of aboriginal education can include shirking of responsibility.

We need better and better-funded native alternative schools, again, partnerships with provincial programs and local school boards. We need strengthened relationships with first nations communities and organizations to make sure our efforts work together. Quite often we tend to be pitched against each other in the urban first nation reality and we need to make sure that we're working toward the same end.

With respect to post-secondary education, only 23% of aboriginal people aged 18 to 29 reported having completed post-secondary education, compared to 43% in the rest of Canada. That is probably best indicated in the age group of 30 to 34, where 10% of the aboriginal population was back in school full-time versus only 5% of the mainstream population. People are dropping out. The public school system is failing their kids. Once they try to work and succeed for a while, they find other avenues to get back into the school system. We need to find ways of catching them once they do drop out and to make sure they have opportunities to get back into school.

• (1545)

We have partnerships with groups like the Canadian Council of Learning, looking at the issue of high aboriginal youth dropout rates. We're partnering with them on a stay-in-school comic book. We're focusing on literacy programs and making sure kids understand the impacts of what happens when you drop out of school, and we are focusing on kids having opportunities to get reintegrated into community-based initiatives.

Moving forward, the National Association of Friendship Centres believes that we need to recognize the specific urban needs that exist; and policy approaches such as these must be taken into account

when developing post-secondary education initiatives to reach non-status Indians and people with other aboriginal identities.

We obviously need a national early learning and child care program; we need to strengthen engagements with provinces and individual school boards; we need better supports and more native alternative schools across the country; we need to have strengthened relationships with first nations and their organizations in the delivery of education initiatives; and we need to have more inclusive scholarships that include all of Canada's aboriginal people.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you for that presentation.

We're going to move on to questions now. Who would like to start?

Mr. Russell.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Peter Dinsdale, or Peter, I should call you, as we had the opportunity to meet early on to talk about the National Association of Friendship Centres' program. I'm glad to see that there's been some movement on that.

I also believe I heard you say that you would have liked to have seen the objectives of the Kelowna accord broadened or expanded upon. Instead, I guess what we have seen is the government take the Kelowna money and spend it on other priorities.

As well, with the early childhood and learning facet that you talked about, we should not directly focus on post-secondary education, but it has implications for post-secondary education. As you know, that's also been gutted by the Conservative government.

I also know that you guys do perform a very valuable service. Certainly I can speak from experience in having dealt with aboriginal groups and organizations for over 10 or 12 years, and also experience with the Labrador Friendship Centre, which does an enormous amount of work, not solely on its own, but in cooperation with a whole bunch of other organizations and agencies within Labrador.

I just have a couple of questions. How much does the friendship centre depend on other sources of funding, aside from its own core program, to continue its work—friendship centres generally—and what type of impact does that have on program delivery? What I'm getting at here is that if you're advocating having a greater role in terms of program delivery, or in terms of interventions that help people meet their educational needs, is there an underpinning there in the sense that you need to have more stability in terms of your core funding? I know that in Labrador, for instance, the friendship centre seems to depend on a whole range of programs just to keep itself functioning, in terms of its administration, its overhead and maintenance, and things of that nature.

We had the unfortunate incident not too long ago where the HIV/AIDS project for the friendship centre in Labrador was cancelled by the government through the Public Health Agency of Canada. I just want you to give us a sense of that.

As well, you talked a little bit about, I guess, the competition that's sometimes set up. Can you explain a little bit more about that, and probably how we can overcome those particular challenges?

• (1550)

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: Thank you very much for the question.

Local friendship centres across the country receive a total, including the allocation to run the national office, of \$16,173,000 a year. That's the core funding. That's to keep the buildings open. If you do it on a full-time equivalent number, we're averaging around \$28,000 per staff person in friendship centres across the country. That's the core funding. That money is meant to keep the buildings open and have an executive director, a bookkeeper, and a finance officer.

With respect to the long-term sustainability of friendship centres and is that what we need, I could talk an hour about that, but let me say quickly that in 1995, during the expenditure review process of that time, our program was cut by 25%. It has not been reinvested in since. That cut continues to have its impacts today in tightened administration. If you think gas prices are expensive today, try spending 1996 dollars on them, which is in effect what we're doing.

The minister has recently announced a four-year renewal and commitment to the friendship centre program, which we were very happy with. It gives us that breathing room and that stability to know that over the next four years we will continue to receive the same amount we received in 1996. The minister has also committed to a joint NAFC-Heritage Canada staff process reviewing our current funding levels, and the minister has asked us to bring back a plan on what the local friendship centres need.

So there is no question that we need more resources. We're making that case to government. We're encouraged by their support of that to date.

With respect to the issue of other funding partners, the friendship centre program isn't intended to be the sole funding source for those community agencies. It very much is an enabler. It's like giving you the gasoline for your engine to go and drive your car and do the things you need to do, and because of that investment that the Government of Canada makes in urban aboriginal people, we're able to go out and partner with provinces, territories, and municipalities, and with other federal departments to provide the programming.

It's unfortunate that programs get cut. They come and go, unfortunately. I think that's part of the challenge of urban aboriginal programming in general: there's a distinct lack of commitment to its ongoing resource needs.

On your last question, about division among the groups, we're trying not to get caught in that trap. There are definite political issues in play in representing first nations and aboriginal peoples, Métis, and Inuit across this country. We serve those people irrespective of the jurisdictional battles that go on every day across this country, and our commitment to serving people and communities won't falter.

We want to work with the groups where they're willing to work with us. We're proud of a recent protocol we signed with the Assembly of First Nations to do just that, and we're hopeful that we

can be, if nothing else, a service delivery provider in communities and not get caught in those squabbles.

Mr. Todd Russell: Thank you.

I'll share the rest of my time with Mr. Merasty.

The Chair: Mr. Merasty, you have a minute and a half.

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): Thanks for your presentation.

I've had a long history with the friendship centres as well. My mother-in-law was executive director and national representative. My mother worked for twenty years in the friendship centres.

I know there was a national review done of the friendship centres. Notwithstanding the four-year renewal, has there been any feedback on that national review in which you had called for some improvements?

Secondly, most of the friendship centres service a population that's somewhat low income and needs some supports. Friendship centres have been invaluable in providing that support. Furthermore, they're not usually located in affluent neighbourhoods. They're closer to the population they serve.

• (1555)

The Chair: Please be brief or you're not going to get an answer.

Mr. Gary Merasty: I'm just wrapping up with the question now.

The national day care early learning program was cut by this government. Headstart early learning is critical, as you mentioned. The tax credit proposal talked about by the government to build child care spaces, in my view, does not work in economically marginalized areas or on reserve, but friendship centres in these urban inner-city neighbourhoods for some.... Would you share that view?

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: I think I would dodge that question entirely by saying many of the people we serve in communities don't have an income to apply a tax credit against. That's the nature of the business that we do. We're a food bank to a lot, a shelter to a lot of people, and a front-line service delivery centre.

With respect to the national review, we've gone through a summit of evaluation on behalf of Heritage Canada. That is part of the Treasury Board requirements to renew the program. It found that we're an effective, cost-effective program that has no program duplication, remains in line with departmental objectives, and continues to provide a valued service for Canadians.

With respect to the funding review we've asked for, that is ongoing. The minister has committed to meeting with us again on June 29, and we're hopeful we'll receive a go-ahead to continue the work we're doing. We will naturally appreciate your support as we move forward with that program.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lemay.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Chair, how long do he have?

[English]

The Chair: You have seven minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: I only plan to use two. I will share the rest of my time with my colleague, Mr. Lévesque, who knows Aboriginal friendship centres well since there are three in his riding.

I would gladly welcome one your facilities in the Témiscamingue region where there is an Algonquin population. I was a legal aid lawyer for 25 years and I don't doubt that Aboriginal friendship centres play an important role in society.

There is something I would like to understand. In your presentation, you addressed education, and we will deal with post secondary education. Are Aboriginal friendship centres crossover points? Can friendship centres be a springboard for Aboriginal people who leave their reserve or their environment to further their education at a university or college in town? Can they go through an Aboriginal friendship centres to get a student loan, a scholarship or any other type of assistance? What is your role in that kind of scenario?

[English]

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: Thank you for the question.

I would say, first off, we do provide a go-between, in general, between the aboriginal community and the non-aboriginal community in many respects. With respect to education, a lot come in to attend education programs and get direct services from local centres. How that translates to a post-secondary reality is a little bit different. Let me say at the outset that as a student in Sudbury, Ontario, I went to the N'Swakamok Friendship Centre for services and cultural programs and those types of things. We provide other supports to students when they're going in.

As to the total amount of the bursaries that I'm able to provide, I get no funding from anywhere to have those bursaries; our youth fundraise all year, quite honestly, to give out those bursaries. We're trying to give \$2,000 a year to two different people. So we simply don't have the funding right now—we have the network, but not the funding—to deliver bursaries in communities where we certainly could.

The Chair: Monsieur Lévesque.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Dinsdale, thank you for coming. I'm happy to see you. There are three centres in my area, but perhaps I should keep that information to myself as they're very efficient and my colleague will probably want to have one transferred to his riding.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Indeed.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: I know that outside of welcoming Aboriginals who have just left their reserve, some centres occasionally accommodate people who have no place to go. You help families out when one of the parents, if not both, have gone

back to school by providing child care services. Earlier, you also indicated that you had received government assistance in response to some of your demands and I certainly hope that you will obtain the rest of the funding you are seeking. How can you get additional assistance for the various Aboriginal friendship centres?

• (1600)

[English]

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: We receive \$16 million directly through the aboriginal friendship centre program at the national level. We have some other government programs that we provide on behalf of the department and the federal government. But more importantly, what happens on ground is that funding will come from some of the housing projects through CMHC, direct delivery of programs, or through the National Secretariat on Homelessness. Val d'Or has a shelter that they've been able to provide through that program.

They have a variety of other partnerships with provincial housing programs, as well as municipal programs, where they have the kind of partnerships to provide them. So it's a varied funding level.

The important thing about friendship centres is that they are meant to adapt to the community they serve, and not be a one-national-size-fits-all approach. The local centres are autonomous boards of directors that are able to go out and meet the needs of the communities they serve.

The Chair: You have two more minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: If the financial assistance were to suddenly dry up and friendship centres across Canada disappeared, what impact would that have?

[English]

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: Well, without being an alarmist, you would have young mothers who wouldn't get formula for their children, and they'd be living in poverty. You would have people who come to food banks not having access to that food. You'd have people in drug and alcohol counselling no longer having access to those counsellors. You would have community agencies shut down, places of celebration of cultural learning and achievement no longer existing in the community. You would not have a first point of contact and referral for aboriginal peoples coming from first nations into urban areas. You would not have access to those education and social initiatives that we provide in communities. Youth at risk would not have a gym to play in on Friday nights; so, without being alarmist, they would, in all likelihood, be out partying, breaking windows, and making babies.

The friendship centres play a pivotal role in the social harmony and access to social programs in communities. I think that would be the impact, in all honesty.

The Chair: Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I want to thank Mr. Dinsdale for his appearance today.

I too have friendship centres in my riding—Hiie'yu Lelum and Tillicum Haus—and both are very fine examples of organizations that do a great deal of good service to the community. They are involved in a wide range of programs and our community would be sorely disadvantaged if they were not in place. Although I can't directly correlate it, one of the friendship centres did temporarily lose some funding for some youth programs, and we saw youth vandalism go up in the community significantly. When that funding was reinstated the vandalism started to taper off again. So although no study was done, there seems to be a link.

I want to just briefly go back to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. It clearly talked about the need to pay attention to urban aboriginal peoples, and it talked about the fact that people wanted to be able to maintain their distinctive cultures and to exercise significant governance over their daily lives. In this overview that I've got, by Newhouse and Peters, there was a paper by Richards and Vining that talked about exploring the “correlates of Aboriginal student success off reserve”. They looked at recommending facilitating aboriginal participation in the school system through strategies such as the introduction of a distinct aboriginal school system, or the development of schools with special mandates to honour aboriginal tradition.

I wonder if you could comment on ways the friendship centre can contribute to helping aboriginal peoples maintain a distinctive culture and some of that cultural heritage that's so important.

•(1605)

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: It has a tremendous impact on education outcomes. My first job out of university was working in downtown Toronto in a place called Native Child and Family Services. The organization worked with street kids in that community, who were coming into our drop-in, to develop an alternative school in partnership with the Toronto District School Board. This school, as we envisioned, was modelled after the three alternative schools that were existing in friendship centres at that time. The one in Sudbury, which I did a placement at when I was doing my graduate work up there, really was about reintegrating aboriginal kids who had dropped out of school back into the public education school system. We did that through using their distance learning education programs.

What was important and why our kids succeeded was because we had a blanket of cultural services wrapped around those children to shield them from the issues they were facing at home or living on the street or living in shelters, so they could finish school and go on.

I say, half in jest, that it's hard to learn trigonometry when your home life is upside down, when your parents are drinking, when you have dysfunction in your community, when you're hungry, when you're looking for a place to live. We tried, as best as we could, through that service delivery centre, to remove all of those issues for that student while they were there in a safe place so they could learn. We took street kids who were living in shelters and had them going to the University of Toronto, a school my grades weren't good enough to get into—and good for them. These were smart kids who through their own life circumstances were unable to succeed, and when we removed some of those barriers and gave them an opportunity through culturally appropriate programs, given the same

rigorous curriculum—let's not have aboriginal programs that are less stringent—they were able to succeed.

I would challenge not only the committee but also the government to have equally rigorous post-secondary challenges, but provide the services to remove the issues our people are facing in communities so they can be successful.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you for that answer.

I also want to just briefly touch on funding. My experience has been that a significant portion of the executive director's time is spent trying to drum up funding from somewhere. I would argue that we would be far better positioned by providing sufficient core funding to these organizations so that executive directors could focus on delivery of service rather than fundraising.

I wonder if you could comment on that.

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: Absolutely, and not only in terms of fundraising.... Look, we're paying our executive directors, if we did the full-time equivalent, \$28,000 a year. If we were paying them like your program management within the public service department, your PM levels, the PM-07 making \$90,000 a year, we would not only have higher qualified staff who are able to go out and get better programs, we'd have greater levels of accountability and we'd hire a much better worker.

In friendship centres, we hire executive directors when they're young, like me. We train them, and then the government scoops them up because they can get a pension, they can get a salary, they can have access to perks, they can have a career. We need to build that kind of infrastructure and economy in service delivery communities, not only in friendship centres, but also in those that provide services on behalf of the Government of Canada.

So it's a challenge, for sure, and the more money we pay is not only going to give them more time to focus on what they should be doing, but we're also going to hire qualified people who are better at doing it to leverage more partnerships and get more programs.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

On the government side, Mr. Albrecht.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Dinsdale, for being here today. I really enjoyed your presentation.

I just want to try to correct a misperception on the other side in relation to the tax credit for children—and I admire your wisdom in dodging the question. I would like to point out that the tax credit has nothing to do with individuals receiving the tax credit; it was for businesses. Another part of that was the whole idea of encouraging community groups to approach government with proposals to create child care spaces. It would seem to me that you would have an ideal situation where you as a community group could approach government to fill out an application—that's a second issue.

On page 14 of your presentation, you mention that only 16% of six-year-old aboriginal children living off reserve had attended pre-school programs, and the next bullet refers to only 42% had not attended pre-school. I'm just wondering if you could identify what components are at play here. Is it primarily an accessibility problem, or is it a cultural expectation in terms of aboriginal families preferring to care for their children within their homes, or is there a mix of those two issues at play?

• (1610)

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: Well, we know there's a definite access issue across the country. There are simply not enough aboriginal head start sites across the country to deal with the growing demands. Those that do have programs have them overrun with children. We've been certainly active in approaching government to expand those sites to much-needed areas across the country.

I apologize for misunderstanding the earlier question around the tax credit issue. We are actually, in all honesty, trying to get to Minister Finley, to talk about the process and to see where the opportunities might exist. I apologize for misunderstanding the question.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: That's fine; I don't think it was your issue.

A second question that I have relates to the very last sentence of your presentation. I think you said something about all-inclusive scholarships. I guess I would ask what obstacles there are to affording equal access to these scholarship funds for both on-reserve and off-reserve aboriginal people.

As a second part of that question, is there any way people can access scholarship or bursary funds for the alternative schools that are running? I imagine that an adult wanting to return to school might need some financial assistance. Are they available for that? What is the story on that issue?

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: The alternative schools where I was active most directly were in Ontario's jurisdiction, so they were able to if they met all the criteria. They were mostly on student welfare, quite honestly, while they were in our community agencies, accessing the program, so there were no scholarships per se for them to go back to school.

With respect to the inclusive nature, there's simply not enough money available for scholarships. I read with interest some of the minutes of proceedings of this committee when you had presentations and conversations on whether or not post-secondary education is discretionary funding. It seems the department believes it is. I'll tell you, I'm a status Indian from Curve Lake First Nation, and my first three years of university were not funded by my community. There are priority issues, there are access issues, and I think there are policy issues that need to be addressed. I took out loans just like everyone else, and I'm paying them back today. But in my three previous years and my graduate work, I was able to....

I don't think the issue is that my community doesn't want to support me; I think there are too many people ready to go. We have, what, 90% of kids—I should remember the number—not completing university right now? We want to pick that up. And if you want to pick that up immediately, give them money to go. We have kids on waiting lists who aren't able to go. We have kids who are ready, who have gone through the system, who have applied and been accepted,

and who don't have the resources. They may or may not feel comfortable applying through the student loans process. I think there's still some angst in a lot of communities about accessing that kind of process. Once the band turns them down, they might not go back. So that's part of the inclusiveness, making sure there's access and funding available.

There's also another issue. If we're serious about aboriginal kids graduating from school, if we believe that's an issue—and it's not simply discretionary funding, but funding to the level needed—that's only status Indians. But you also have non-status aboriginal people in this country, you have Métis people in this country—although Métis bursaries, if Kelowna is endorsed, will exist—and you have Inuit kids across the country needing access.

So if we're serious, it's about not legal responsibility but responsibility as a society, making sure we have some kind of equity.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Is there an equity issue in terms of different groups accessing the resources? As well, is there an accountability issue in terms of how the funds are allocated and then disbursed within the band council?

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: I have not had issues with accountability with my first nation providing services for me. However, I think the issue is one of both access and equity—access across the country and equity as to your legal status. If Bill C-31 defines me as an Indian, I have access; if the government decides I'm not an Indian, I don't have access.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Blaney, you have two minutes.

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Two minutes? Okay. I'm going to go with my short question, then.

[Translation]

We have two visions for education. Through friendship centres, you help Aboriginals enter our school systems. Some groups seem to feel that it's better to have parallel structures. What is your take on this?

You somewhat answered my question earlier when you said that off reserve Aboriginals should have access to school curriculums and scholarships. Could you elaborate on your vision for the medium term with regard to students living off reserve?

[English]

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: If I were the minister of aboriginal education, I would do both. I would make sure we had appropriate feeder systems in the post-secondary programs where kids and communities could prepare themselves and be qualified for school. That would be number one, to deal with this growing issue in communities. Two, I would ensure equitable access once they're prepared.

So yes, part of it is the backlog of first nations students who are ready, but the second issue is the other aboriginal people—maybe the majority of aboriginal people—who simply don't have access to those programs at all.

• (1615)

Mr. Steven Blaney: Thank you.

The Chair: Madam Neville, please.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thank you for being here today.

Before I ask my question, I just want to clarify one thing we're muddled on, and that's tax credits. My understanding is that tax credits are applicable not to not-for-profit organizations but really to profit organizations. But you will have your meeting with the minister and determine it accordingly.

I would like to ask a number of questions. You raised some important issues related to urban education, and I want to follow up on post-secondary education. I'll ask the two questions, and then if we have time we'll come back.

What is your understanding of the implication of not proceeding with Kelowna in terms of access, or lack of access, for aboriginal students—Métis, first nations, treaty, non-treaty—to post-secondary education?

My second question relates to the K-to-12 system. You sound familiar with the Children of the Earth and Niji Mahkwa schools in Winnipeg. I know those schools well, and I know what Winnipeg has spent on those schools—on curriculum development, on teacher training, and on many other aspects of the educational program there. Most of that funding has come from the taxpayers of the city of Winnipeg.

Do you believe there is a role for the federal government as it relates to aboriginal education in the urban setting, in terms of curriculum development, teacher training, or whatever? And if so, how would you see that?

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: With respect to Kelowna, obviously we were dissatisfied with the process in terms of how we would impact education; we had some thoughts on how maybe we should approach it. I should probably leave this for the groups who were intimate in the development of it to talk about the impacts of it not getting funded. That said, we support Kelowna and the commitments. We believe the commitments to Métis bursaries and education processes can only help the issue. You can only help by having first nations school boards, raising standards to provincial standards, and having bursaries. It's only going to help my brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, cousins and other relations living in those communities. I want them to succeed, and they need those things. We need to do so much more in the urban areas, and that's what we were saying as part of our dialogue.

With respect to the question of funding responsibilities, we thought the whole round table process in Kelowna was really a missed opportunity to lay some of those issues on the table. That was the first meeting of first ministers on aboriginal issues—not a constitutional meeting—since the sixties, when it was resolved that we were going to start dealing with health issues off reserve. It would have been a great opportunity to talk about the same issues.

I don't know what the legal constitutional responsibilities are in terms of the division of powers and those kinds of notions, but an incredible moral responsibility weighs on the government to do something.

I'm skirting the question, because I don't pretend to be a constitutional scholar, but I can tell you that people in communities need the services. While we continue to squabble, there will be some great programs in Winnipeg, and some in Toronto and elsewhere, but the issue won't be dealt with strategically across the country for another decade.

Hon. Anita Neville: Okay.

Can you comment on the aboriginal head start program, and on what you know to be the difference for children? In Manitoba, which I know well, the programs are limited, particularly in the urban setting. It appears to me there needs to be better coordination between the aboriginal head start program and the public school system. There's often a duplication.

Do you know what impact the aboriginal head start program has had? Are you aware of studies whereby children have attended or have not attended, and longitudinal studies on the outcomes in terms of their learning and other life skills?

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: I certainly can't quote any longitudinal studies that have measured the impact of those students who've attended versus those who haven't. We're attempting to do some research with school boards to look at urban churn—that is, kids living in poverty, leaving one house because dad didn't get the job, going to live with uncle, changing schools, and not having school records follow because the family has already moved again. We're attempting to look at the impacts of those kids dropping out.

A lot of jurisdictions don't target aboriginal people in the school system, so it's hard for us to track that progress unless we had tracked the client early on. We're hoping that some of your western ridings and some of the western cities will have that kind of... because some are starting to collect those statistics.

I could look to see what my policy analyst has with respect to some of your specific questions, and I'd be happy to share those and follow up with you, but I don't have anything with me today.

I can tell you, though, we know it has an impact. Just looking at the kids who are going through, we can see that they're stronger. They seem better prepared to deal with the racism issues they feel in the public school system. And those issues still exist, although we haven't talked about those impacts yet.

So the kids certainly have more successful outcomes, but I can see if we have any specific studies that we can point you to.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to ask the question this time, if the committee doesn't mind.

I want to get to moving forward rather than looking back. We've done a lot of that in the discussion, looking back at other arrangements. On page 20 you talk about recognizing "urban needs". Have you identified those needs, and have you fixed a cost to addressing those needs?

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: With respect to an urban aboriginal education plan, we've been focused on making sure our programs are able to keep their doors open, quite frankly, sir. We had this invite yesterday at around noon, so we've had a brief amount of time to pull together what we're doing on education.

Across the country, we're starting to cost out the expansion of the alternative school programs to areas where they're needed. We've seen some incredibly successful programs, in Ontario and elsewhere, that we could model and expand. Wouldn't it be a great vision to have a feeder system of kids who are dropping out of school? Half of them are dropping out right now. Where are they going? Let's bring them into friendship centres, where there are well-functioning alternative schools with a network of services and supports.

Quite frankly, we could also be a delivery partner in terms of post-secondary education, accessing students in urban areas where you might not have access now.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bruinooge.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Thank you very much for your presentation so far. I had the opportunity to meet with you earlier and I appreciate that as well.

In terms of the lack of focus on the urban aboriginal population that you mentioned, I think this is something the new government is definitely interested in moving forward with. I'm glad to see that there are people like you who are advocating for those issues.

I want to bring it back to my home city—a city that I share with my honourable colleague, Ms. Neville—where I think we must likely have the largest friendship centre in Canada, just in the sheer size of the building. I'm sure you've been there before. It's a grand building, which originally was a CN building from the 1920s. It's very historic and quite nice. Thankfully, the organization there has been able to restore it somewhat.

Perhaps you could walk me through, using this example, how these organizations tend to take on a lot of satellite organizations, build them into the overall framework of services, and by doing that, they are able to leverage other government programs.

I'm not sure if you can speak to this example, but if you can, go for it.

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: I can't speak to that example, because unfortunately, that's not our friendship centre. That's the main service delivery centre of the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg.

We have a friendship centre, the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre of Winnipeg, but it's not at the site you're talking about. It's an example, though, of how friendship centres are community developers. A lot of programs, such as housing programs, start in friendship centres. They grow, they become too big, and they become their own organization.

In the larger communities in this country, the Winnipegs, Torontos, Vancouvers, the friendship centres started a lot of the other aboriginal service providers in those communities. So they become one of many. In medium-sized communities, they are one of a few that usually help others start up. In the smaller communities, they're the only game in town. Those are the three types of friendship centres that we have.

But you're absolutely right: that's the role that friendship centres play. By paying for the executive director, the receptionist, the bookkeeper, and the building, we can go to another government department. They might only have a \$100,000 program—that's a one-time program—so depending on the department, we get 10% to 15% for administration; we get \$10,000 to \$15,000 to run the program. Clearly, this is not enough to open a building or to hire an executive director or the bookkeeper, but it's enough to run the program and to support the other costs associated with it.

That's what we mean when we say that the friendship centre program is an enabler. Because the core is there, we can do other programs as a result.

• (1625)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Which departments, in particular, do you see the most additional funding from?

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: At the national level, we see Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. At the local level, a lot of it is Health Canada that is providing head start programs, aboriginal health programs, and diabetes programs. They are very much on-the-ground, focused kinds of initiatives. We also do employment and training programs, housing and homelessness programs, and we partner with the Department of Indian Affairs on some of their programs. Again, we certainly do all kinds of provincial and municipal...the complexities of which are obviously too much for this discussion.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Do you have a percentage, as in relation to—

The Chair: Mr. Bruinooge, we're out of time.

Mr. Lévesque.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Mr. Dinsdale, one out of the three buildings that house a friendship Center in my riding was built in Val-d'Or specifically to cater to people from James Bay and Nunavik who are now established in the Val-d'Or area. In Senneterre and Chibougamau, they are small rented premises. Do you have any intention of buying them?

Are the programs delivered by the provinces, cities or other organizations ongoing, or is there uncertainty as to whether they will be renewed?

[English]

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: It varies. There are a number of one-off programs and they're as stable as any federal government program. Every five years we have another review to determine the cost-effectiveness and where it needs to be delivered.

I think that's the nature of service delivery work, but aboriginal service delivery work is more complex. As the attention waxes and wanes on aboriginal issues, so will the access to programs, particularly in an urban area.

The Chair: Monsieur Lemay.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Thank you. I will share the rest of my time with Mr. Blaney.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Blaney.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney: You said that an agreement was reached before Christmas, but you felt it didn't go far enough.

What are you hoping to get from the government in order to better fulfill your mission? Are you looking for more friendship centres? Are you looking to expand the services you already offer? What are you looking for? If the Indian affairs and Northern development minister gave you the opportunity to make such a request, what would it look like?

[English]

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: We told everyone \$20 million a year more.

In all honesty, we want people in urban communities to have access to cost-effective and efficient programs. We think friendship centres are that model. There is a need for more friendship centres across the country. There is a need for increased ability for the operational centres. That includes wages for local executive directors, a capital renewal portion to reinvest in deteriorating buildings, and training dollars, so that government taxpayer money is well spent. We have the best-trained boards we can have across the country, and we can increase strengthening of those things with more supports for the centres at a variety of levels.

Maybe it's because I'm young and foolish, but we're cautiously optimistic that this process with the minister is going to bear some fruit. She seems open to hearing what the challenges are. She seems open to working with departmental officials on addressing it.

Whether or not I believe *The Globe and Mail* that there is going to be a fall budget—or if it's a February budget—I hope we're standing in the gallery, cheering the announcement of increased funding for friendship centres. It's going to mean that your jobs will be easier, because people in communities are going to have better access to programs and services.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney: Thank you.

I did not expect my question to be so costly. Thank you, Mr. Dinsdale.

[English]

The Chair: I have a question.

We're talking about expanding your services. Do you see that eventually we'll get to the root of some of those problems and see a sunset to what you're doing, so that it's not needed any more? Is that

airy-fairy, or is that something you feel is a target you could see sometime, not in the near future but at a distant future?

• (1630)

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: Let me put it into the context of my family and background. I am the first person from my family to graduate high school. It wasn't seen as a success that I was going away to university. Leaving my community and my family to go away and do studies was a horrific event—and to what end? What did that mean? Were we rejecting our community? What were we doing? Did we feel we were too good?

I assure you that my child will go to some kind of post-secondary education. There will be a cultural achievement in my household. I think the answer to your question is that the best we can do is create a cultural achievement in every aboriginal household across this country. Graduate that single aboriginal woman in downtown Winnipeg, so that she has the expectation for her child. It's no longer okay to have multi-generational high school dropouts. The expectation is that we finish school. The expectation is that we succeed in one area or another. I believe in all honesty that is how we are going to get to the source of the problems.

Your work is tremendously important. To be honest, I think jumping to post-secondary education is like trying to win the 100 metres in the Olympics before you win a high school track meet. I think you need to address the dropout issue in the community, and make sure there's reintegration and that healthy programs are available. The goal should absolutely be post-secondary education, but make sure that stable base exists.

The Chair: To clarify, I might say the reason we're not addressing this first is because the department is already looking at it, so we decided to look at post-secondary education.

We're going to finish off with Madam Crowder, please.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I'll be brief. I want to make a quick comment.

Somebody mentioned about whether the head start program had been studied. I'm not aware of studies in Canada, but I know that Hawaii, which is a model for the head start program, did studies that demonstrated significant impact on children once they got into the school system.

The other comment is that there is a fellow by the name of Clyde Hertzman, from the University of British Columbia, who has done a lot of work on social mapping. He's an expert in early learning and childhood development. His work has demonstrated that for every dollar we spend on children under the age of six, we save seven dollars in the long run on justice, education, health, and social services. So there is a significant amount of work out there that would support the good work you do, particularly with young moms and families.

The question I have for you is a bit jurisdictional. I know you're not a constitutional expert, but I wonder if you might suggest ways we might look at this differently. What we have is a situation in which the federal government says that by and large it does not have responsibility for people who live off reserve, that it's a provincial responsibility, and therefore they wash their hands of it, even though they do put some money into friendship centres and off-reserve housing. Do you have any suggestions on how we might tackle this jurisdictional issue?

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: I would only point you to recent history in terms of this country. In the 1960s you had the same jurisdictional issues over status Indians living off reserve having access to health care programs. Somehow you've solved that issue by ensuring that off-reserve aboriginal people should have access to some program. I'm not sure if it was a recognition of a treaty responsibility or more responsibility, but you managed to overcome those issues.

With respect to municipal education, when I was approached by the Toronto District School Board to develop the program we ended up having—and it's quite successful—they weren't interested in any political conversation, any rights-based conversations. The only interest was because of 35 kids in a classroom ready to be taught—all due to my drop-in, thank you very much—and they had a responsibility under the Education Act to provide them with an education. That was the only thing that was persuasive. It wasn't a jurisdictional battle; it was very much using their own numbers against them, quite frankly. I'm not sure how you go about it from your perspective, but maybe the health care debates of the sixties will help verify that for you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That was a great presentation, and you had good answers to the questions. I really do appreciate that. I really think you're the type of person that is where the rubber meets the road, who is getting things done and meeting those needs. We do appreciate it, and I hope we'll see some more funding to assist you in what you're doing. Thank you.

I'm just going to suspend for five minutes.

•(1630)

(Pause)

•(1640)

The Chair: Members, a number of weeks ago Madam Neville put forward a notice of motion with regard to *Walking Arm-in-Arm to Resolve the Issue of On-Reserve Matrimonial Real Property*. We didn't deal with it as a committee, as other issues came up. Madam Neville would like to have this dealt with now.

The question I have for the committee, and it is at the pleasure of the committee, is do you want to deal with this in the open committee meeting or in camera? I've checked with the clerk, and it doesn't make any difference where we deal with it, as it would still have the same relevance.

Hon. Anita Neville: I would like to do it in public, only because it's then on the record.

The Chair: Okay, if that is the case, Madam Neville, do you want to make some statements with regard to this motion?

Hon. Anita Neville: Very briefly, Mr. Chairman, the motion here is self-explanatory.

This is an important issue. The committee spent a great deal of time last year in the previous Parliament studying this issue. This issue has been studied by the Senate committee. I know the issue is before the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, because I sit on that committee. I know that all parties are committed to trying to resolve the issue, and while it's a very complicated issue, it's an issue on which we have to move forward.

I'm only asking that the report be tabled and that the government take its 120 days—or 60 days—to respond to it, which is a fair length of time.

•(1645)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lemay, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Chairman, I have two issues with Ms. Neville's motion.

Obviously, no one could be against such a proposition, but is not too early to introduce it?

Tomorrow, members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women will begin examining Aboriginal women's rights and the disposition of matrimonial real property on a reserve. The proposal was made by our colleague Ms. Mourani and the committee should be debating it tomorrow. That's my first issue.

Moreover, there's Bill C-289, which was tabled in the House by Mr. Pallister. I think you all know what it deals with. I'm not sure what to do. If we consider the motion put before us now, then in a few months, when we're asked to review C-289, we will be doing the same thing twice over. We cannot address the same issue twice, we simply have to much to do over the course of the coming months.

I'm putting the question to you. I'm not sure what to think. I believe it would be counter-productive to debate the same subject twice.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

Madam Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Perhaps I'm misunderstanding this, but my understanding of this motion is that we won't be debating it in this committee; we're simply asking that the report that was done previously by the aboriginal affairs committee be resubmitted to the House for the government to respond to it. So it wouldn't actually take up any of this committee's time, and it wouldn't preclude us from responding to Bill C-289, the private member's bill.

I'm speaking in favour of having this report go forward to the House. As Ms. Neville pointed out, this has been studied to death, and I think it's appropriate that we ask for the report to be resubmitted in order to get some response from the government, and perhaps thereby form a basis for some work that might actually move forward.

The Chair: Okay, I'm going to go to the government side here.

Mr. Bruinooge, go ahead, please.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: In relation to the motion, I think the point has already been made that in fact not only has the report been submitted previously, but there is currently a private member's bill before the House. This committee is going to get the opportunity to debate that bill as it proceeds through the House, and also I'd like to highlight the fact that the minister is actually going to be meeting with the status of women committee next week. I believe that, in light of these things, our resubmitting of a report would just send the message that we're not identifying the fact that there is actually action being taken right now.

The Chair: I just want to remind the committee—

Yes, Mr. Bruinooge?

• (1650)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: You never see a response before that, so that's why I'm asking why you wouldn't wait until the minister meets with the status of women committee.

The Chair: I just want to remind the committee—and I've said this before in this regard—that this committee, as a standing committee of the House, is not the standing committee of government. It's the standing committee of the House, which is all parties. When a report is tabled by the chair of the committee, it's tabled to the House, not to the government, and the government needs to respond to it.

As I brought up before, do you keep retabing reports just because governments change? I think that once it is recorded in the House, there has to be a response by the government. As I'm the servant of this committee, I'll do whatever the committee directs, but as the parliamentary secretary has said, this is going to come forward as a private member's bill, and it will be debated by this committee sometime in the future. I would just put that out there for the committee to consider.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Chair, I would just like to respond to that, if you don't mind, for a moment.

I believe this committee has taken the initiative on two previous items, recommendations regarding which were made based on its opinion of the government's direction. However, on this particular item, the government is showing some direction, so I think it wouldn't be the right move to proceed. I would suggest that we do not proceed with tabling this report at this time.

The Chair: Madam Neville, go ahead, please.

Hon. Anita Neville: I don't want to prolong the debate, Mr. Chairman.

Referring to the private member's bill that's been tabled, it is the antithesis of what this report has recommended. The private member's bill speaks about matrimonial property being brought in according to the provincial laws of the jurisdiction, which we have certainly heard is not agreeable to many of the aboriginal communities. So comparing one to the other just doesn't make sense.

I'm really genuinely puzzled by the unwillingness of the government to provide a response to a thoughtful report that came about after extensive consultation with aboriginal groups, with community groups. It was done. We've changed government. This

government quite clearly has a different approach to the aboriginal community from that taken by the previous government. I don't think it's unfair to ask for a comprehensive, fulsome response. We can't get that in a ten-minute presentation by the minister.

I've met with the minister. I know that he is committed to trying to resolve this issue. It's a very complicated issue. It's not simply a matter of imposing the provincial jurisdictions on the communities involved. It's a very complicated issue. There are many court decisions on this issue.

I think that, as a committee, we are entitled to have a comprehensive, fulsome answer. I'm repeating myself, but it's almost an insult to the members of this committee, to members of the government, to want to avoid or sabotage a response to the committee. It's being put forward in good faith. It is an important issue that people from coast to coast are watching, and, as a committee seized with this, we're entitled to know what this government wants to do or what their thinking is.

They have a long time to respond. This is simply a request for a response. There's a long time before the response has to be tabled, and I really don't understand the hesitation.

The Chair: Mr. Lévesque is next, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Did the previous government table a response to the committee's fifth report entitled "Walking arm-in-arm to resolve the issue of on reserve matrimonial real property" tabled during the first session of the 38th Parliament?

[*English*]

The Chair: The answer to that is yes. We have a response dated October 6, 2005, from the government at that time—the Honourable Andy Scott. There are a number of recommendations in that report. It has been responded to once already by the House—by the government or minister.

Mr. Lemay, and then Madam Crowder.

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: If the previous government responded to the report, I would like my friends from the Liberal party to tell me why we should table the same report again. That's all I'm trying to understand. In my opinion, it is a very important matter, and it deserves a response, but would this be a duplication of our efforts? I'm probably missing something because I was just handed a copy of the government's response. Where is the problem? I apologize, perhaps I'm not getting the picture clearly. Normally, I see quite clearly, but it's getting late. I'm simply trying to understand.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Actually, I think I can answer, in part, Mr. Lemay's question. In part the problem is that nothing is happening, and that is the challenge. That's why I take the chair's comments that this committee is a creature of the House—but it is the government that we're looking to respond on this.

On Bill C-289, we cannot presume that the bill will pass in the House; it may never get to this committee. If we wait for Bill C-289.... And I don't have the schedule of debate, but there will be one hour of debate and then, at some later time, there will be a second hour of debate. It may or may not pass, and in the mean time we will have lost many months to press for some action on this issue. Women and men have waited years for some action, and in my conversations with both the Assembly of First Nations and the Native Women's Association of Canada, they are once again being cut out of the loop and not being consulted in a meaningful way on some action on this issue. So perhaps a response from the government would provide a catalyst for the department to take some action on this.

I just feel really strongly that women are more disadvantaged by this not being looked at. It's been an issue that women have been asking to be resolved for many, many years.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Crowder.

Mr. Bruinooge.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: I am again going to state that when the minister was here, he did indicate very clearly that this was an important issue to him. He is going to be making a presentation before the Standing Committee on the Status of Women on June 22. I believe the minister is being very clear on this. In terms of his response and the department's response, I've never seen something more telegraphed in all my years of monitoring politics. I'm not a veteran, like some of you across the table, but I would suggest that the minister is clearly engaged with this issue. He's always talked about it in the past, and I would once again ask that we not proceed at this moment with this motion.

The Chair: Because Mr. Lemay was so generous to the government side in the last hour, I'm going to give him the last say, and then I'm going to call the question.

Mr. Lemay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: I quickly glossed over the document. I have a question for the government side members. If the minister thinks he

is going to appear before the Standing Committee on the Status of Women on June 22nd, he might feel very lonely, unless the MPs across the floor tell me we will still be sitting. Indeed the information we've received today, namely that Bill C-2 will probably pass Tuesday, is to the effect that the House will possibly adjourn Wednesday night, on the 21st.

Some honourable members: Hey! Hey!

Mr. Marc Lemay: this is the first you've heard of it? I'm glad to be the first to let you know. According to the information we've received, it is very likely that the House will rise on June 21 around 6 p.m.

We might have a problem on our hands. The government will have 150 days to respond to the report. I think it's appropriate that we ask it to make up its mind.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Roger Préfontaine): According to Standing Order 109, the government has 150 days to table its response.

Mr. Marc Lemay: That means it would have until the end of October or into the month of November to respond. I think it's a good idea to ask the government what's on its mind before then.

● (1700)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Russell, are you going to add anything that we haven't already heard? I want to put the question and get it over with, as we have other things to do.

Mr. Todd Russell: The only thing I can say is that I don't hear an inconsistency here on either side of the issue. Tabling this report, and what the minister is going to do or may or may not do, would only feed into the government's response.

I see no inconsistency in submitting this now for a response from the government.

(Motion agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Do we have consensus to go in camera?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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