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—
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Mr. Colin Mayes

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• (0910)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC)): Committee members, before we begin our orders of the day I just want to say that I made a procedural error a couple of meetings before our recess. Madam Neville called a point of order, and I should have dropped everything and dealt with that point of order. Instead I allowed Mr. Bruinooge to continue his report to Madam Crowder. It was a procedural error, and I apologize to Madam Neville and to the committee for that oversight. It's my understanding this will possibly come forward during the latter half of the next meeting, just so the committee is aware of that.

Mr. Lemay, I understand you're going to introduce some of our guests today.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Chairman, allow me to take a few moments of your time.

For Quebec, and particularly for the Atikamekw Nation, this is a very important moment. I would like to introduce the new Grand Chief and President of the Atikamekw Nation, Ms. Eva Ottawa, who is with us here this morning. She is accompanied by Mr. Paul-Émile Ottawa, Chief of Manawan, and Mr. Jean-Pierre Mattawa, Chief of Opitciwan. Others who should soon arrive — if they're not already here — are Mr. François Neashit, Chief of Wemotaci, as well as Ms. Sandrine Brindejone, Communications Coordinator with the Atikamekw Nation Council. They will attend part of our meeting here this morning. As far as I'm concerned, it is a great honour to have them with us today.

We extend our congratulations to Ms. Ottawa and wish her the best of luck in her new job. She can certainly count on us and the Committee to help her carry out her program.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemay.

This morning we have witnesses from the Assemblée des Premières Nations du Québec et du Labrador and its board of education. I see that Chief Picard is not here right now, but we have, from the First Nations Education Council, Lise Bastien, director, and Gilbert Whiteduck, senior education adviser. From the Cree School Board, we have Gordon Blackned, president. From the University of Quebec in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Edith Cloutier, chairman of the board, and Johanne Jean, president.

Welcome to this committee.

My understanding is that we're going to begin with Ms. Bastien, as the director. Are you going to do the presentation? We'll have ten-minute presentations from each group and then we'll have questions from the board.

[Translation]

Ms. Lise Bastien (Director, First Nations Education Council, Assemblée des Premières Nations du Québec et du Labrador and its Board of Education): Thank you for inviting us to appear. Allow me to apologize for the absence of our Regional Chief, Ghislain Picard. He is very busy these days organizing the First Nations Socio-economic Forum, as most of you already know. However, I would like to pass on a brief message from Ghislain with respect to post-secondary education for First Nations students.

Ghislain believes it is important to make you aware of a devastating fact. First Nations still lag far behind every other segment of the Canadian population with respect to education. In 2004, the Auditor General reported a gap of 28 years. That gap continues to widen and has repercussions on access to employment and socio-economic conditions in general.

With respect to post-secondary education specifically, all the studies show that the higher a person's level of education, the better his or her chances of obtaining meaningful employment. There is no doubt about that. However, opportunities are very limited for the vast majority of First Nations people, since access to post-secondary education remains extremely limited. And this has been the case for many years now. Public figures will never say that First Nations people attending a post-secondary institution face the challenge of successfully completing their education in an environment that is structured, designed and developed by and for a dominant culture. As a result, the obstacles facing First Nations people who attend post-secondary institutions are numerous.

I would just like to conclude Ghislain's message by saying that First Nations are absolutely convinced that there are solutions. We have particular expertise when it comes to education for First Nations people. It would be unfair to design or develop solutions without involving us, because this has a direct impact on our future. It is likely that having one or more post-secondary institutions that are designed for and by First Nations would be a viable solution, in terms of allowing young First Nations people to receive a better education.

That is basically the message that Ghislain wanted to convey to you today. Of course, I gave you only a summary, but I believe I have conveyed the essential points of his message.

Very quickly, I would like to introduce the First Nations Education Council. As an organization, we have been around for more than 21 years and we represent some 22 communities across Quebec, in all areas of education. We have proven ourselves when it comes to managing and administering programs. Of course, our successes are certainly not the kind of thing that would likely make the headlines these days. I think we should be considering what can be done to turn things around as regards the messages conveyed by the media about the successes or particular situation of the First Nations.

These days, we hear a lot about cases of mismanagement or administrative problems, when in actual fact, there are tremendous successes out there and people capable of properly managing, administering and developing programs for First Nations people.

An organization such as ours, which represents 22 communities, has developed expertise over the years which is just as valuable as that of certain departments. It's important that this be recognized. As well, the studies we have conducted on the funding of post-secondary programs should be considered valid.

I will now turn it over to my colleague, Gilbert, who is our senior education advisor and has been working in the educational field for more than 30 years.

• (0915)

[English]

Mr. Gilbert Whiteduck (Senior Education Advisor, First Nations Education Council, Assemblée des Premières Nations du Québec et du Labrador and its Board of Education): Good morning, and thank you for this opportunity to speak to you at this committee. I think it's a unique opportunity for the first nations in Quebec, who unfortunately don't often get this opportunity

I'm aware that you are aware of a lot of the details in regard to the post-secondary program. As you know, the program is divided in two. One part is student support and the other part is the institutional support—very important.

Prior to the 1990s, the student support program was somewhat of an open envelope that came to support all students who were applying. At around that point in time, the program got frozen, got capped. There was only going to be a 2% increase per year, even though the demographics would demonstrate that our population was rising very quickly. We were being somewhat more successful within our schools, having therefore more graduates, but this funding availability was just not there for a lot of our students.

More importantly, the program—and the policy that overlooks the program and that determines the level of funding—was not keeping pace with the realities of society, such as the rising cost of tuition, as you well know, and just the rising cost of living expenses and technology.

So the program has not kept pace, and our students are having a difficult time. A number of students often decide not to go because they just don't have the resources. Knowing the poverty that exists in our communities, certainly the families cannot support their children, even though there's hope here for them to be successful in the post-secondary program.

I want to take a minute to point out a particular situation in Quebec. Vocational training in Quebec is given at the high school level, unlike most other regions of Canada, where it's given at the post-secondary level. Therefore, first nations communities and students in Quebec cannot access the post-secondary program in order to get vocational training. There are limitations, and we're hoping that at one point this is going to be addressed. Obviously a lot of our students are not going to be going to university, but there are many opportunities in the trades, so this has to be examined very carefully.

We note in our statistics a decline in student enrolment at the post-secondary level, both college and university, over the past five or six years. We're seeing the trend going down. We believe it's tied to the policy and to the lack of support for the funding that's required. We also believe it's tied to student support very early at the high school level, ensuring that students will be well prepared, will have the academic background, will have guidance counselling, and, when they're leaving the community, or even going to a first nations post-secondary institution, will again have support.

That is critical. The gap remains—we've had a look at it in our region—at anywhere from 15% to 25%. It varies from one community to another. We see that as unacceptable. We feel that the policy should support the students a lot more and create positive encouragement for them to go on.

• (0920)

[Translation]

Ms. Lise Bastien: I would just like to conclude by proposing a solution that goes beyond simply increasing funding under the current student support policy. Consideration must be given to the possibility of allowing the First Nations to develop their own post-secondary services and institutions.

No people, no nation can develop properly if it does not have its own institutions. I believe you all understand that if we cannot develop our own schools and our own places of worship, we will never have a healthy culture that can develop with pride.

We believe a first step in that direction would be the creation of a post-secondary college or institution that would be much more meaningful for young people who have arrived at that level. For example, colleges give a course on the role of government and citizenry, but nobody ever says anything about the role of Aboriginal government, or even the band council. Nor is there any discussion of the role of First Nations people. The content simply is not meaningful to our young people.

We firmly believe that a college would be an alternative for young Aboriginal students who have completed their secondary level studies wanting to attend college, and who often drop out at that point. People talk a lot about high school dropouts, but they never talk about college dropouts. There are more than people think. Indeed, this phenomenon can be seen in all societies, because this is a critical stage in life. It is at this stage in one's life that one begins to forge one's own ideas.

If an educational institution fosters the development of young leaders who respect their own culture — not necessarily political leaders — they are then better able to play an active and meaningful role within society.

One of the solutions we feel very strongly about is the establishment of a college whose design and content would be developed by First Nations, allowing our young people to be proud to be Aboriginal. One of the biggest challenges we're facing these days is conveying a sense of pride to our young people. Children 5, 6 or 7 years of age who hear negative messages about First Nations people often instinctively want to hide their identity.

Providing First Nations with adequate funding to develop their own institutions would very much foster the active participation of our young people in society.

In conclusion, I just want to mention that I attended an Aboriginal college more than 30 years ago. That college closed five years later. At least 50 young people used to graduate every year. That is an aberration. If this college were still operating in Quebec, we would now have at least 30 times 50 youths with a college level diploma. I can tell you the socio-economic circumstances of our communities would be different. Unfortunately, that was a bad political decision. I very much hope that we can reverse that situation.

I will turn it over to Gilbert for a few last words, so that he can go over the comprehensive solutions we are seeking.

● (0925)

Mr. Gilbert Whiteduck: For a number of years now, First Nations have been making many recommendations, and a lot of studies have been carried out. It is now time to stop studying the issue and take action, by developing specific programs. The First Nations are always ready to work with Indian Affairs to develop viable solutions. People often talk about transparency and accountability. But we are prepared to do it. We want to show that we can manage the funding better, but we have to give our young people opportunities. There are young people in these communities who are waiting. We can change their prospects within our communities. We have to give our young people hope, because they don't have much these days.

My commitment to education in the communities over the last 30 years has allowed me to witness a great deal of loss. We can deplore that, but we should really be thinking of the young people who no longer have any hope, and yet would like to make a positive contribution to Canadian society in their own culture. We need some help over the next 10 to 15 years. It's time to stop talking and start acting.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Blackned, please.

Mr. Gordon Blackned (Chairman, Cree School Board): I'd like to just say briefly that I got lost getting over here. I've never been in these buildings before, not even for a tour.

In any case, I guess the issue I've been asked to participate in here is in relation to the presentation to be made by Madame Édith Cloutier from the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue on the intervention strategy for teaching, research, among the first nations populations.

I'm the current chairman of the Cree School Board. I was elected in August this year, and I represent the Cree Nation of Quebec. You've probably heard a lot about those people. Anyway, my presence here is to give support to Madame Cloutier's presentation in terms of the aspect of providing post-secondary education much closer to the Cree territory.

Presently, the Cree School Board sponsors anywhere from 350 to 400 post-secondary students scattered throughout the province of Quebec, and mostly in the province of Ontario, but we also have students attending different colleges and universities throughout the rest of the country, as far away as B.C.

The main issue that I would like to put forth in terms of supporting the initiative taken by the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue is that our students in the last several years have shown little success in terms of finishing their degree programs or their diploma programs at whatever post-secondary institution they may be attending, and that mainly has to do with the culture shock, the distance away from home. Our students finish high school in their own communities, and once they leave their home communities they're subjected to a whole new environment, a totally strange environment where they are pretty much expected to succeed, and normally this has not really been the case. The establishment of institutions much closer to the Cree territory would be a solution for ensuring that our students do succeed in post-secondary programs.

The Cree Nation of Quebec has evolved quite rapidly over the last 30 years. We have our own Cree School Board, we have our own Cree Health Board, our own Cree companies, Cree businesses, that sort of thing. In February 2002 we signed a new relationship agreement with the Province of Quebec as well as with Hydro-Québec for additional hydroelectric development. Within that agreement, we received a lot of benefits that require us to train, to educate, and to eventually bring about different jobs, or autonomy within the Cree Nation.

Now that calls for a number of positions that need to be created throughout the Cree territory as the communities evolve and the economic development of each of those communities develops. Presently in our school board we have close to, I would say, 1,000 employees. The majority of those employees are in the lower level management areas and also in the support staff area.

We have teachers who have graduated from our teacher training program, which is enshrined into the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement under section 16. Over those years we have developed teachers up to the elementary level. Just recently we included a teacher training program component to bring up secondary level teachers from our elementary sectors.

Now, we still have a large number of non-native teachers who need to be replaced by our own people. We have a lot of nurses and doctors who need to be replaced, eventually, by Cree people.

• (0930)

The entities I'm talking about incur a lot of expenses in providing housing and other benefits for non-native people who come from the south. Even that doesn't really keep them in the communities for a long time. They stay for an average of four years, and then they eventually leave. We have a question of consistency there, and we feel that we need to provide more post-secondary programs much closer to our Cree territory to ensure success.

Our children at a young age start to get familiar with some of the southern communities that are close to the Cree territory. They participate in a lot of educational activities and sporting activities. The new relationship agreement that was signed between the Cree Nation and the Province of Quebec has really triggered much closer relationships with the francophone communities of Val d'Or, Amos, Rouyn-Noranda, and the surrounding region.

I think the Cree School Board needs to look at providing much closer post-secondary education within that domain to ensure that the necessary positions can be filled by our own Cree people, instead of constantly having people from the south come in for several years and then leave without really making a long-term commitment to help in the development of our Cree community.

• (0935)

The Chair: I don't like to interrupt you, but we need to make sure we have time for questions for the committee. If we could move on to Madame Cloutier, I'd appreciate it. Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Edith Cloutier (Chairman of the Board, University of Quebec in Abitibi-Témiscamingue): *Meegwetch, Mr. Blackned. Wachya. Kwe.* Good morning.

Members of the Committee, chiefs, colleagues, my name is Edith Cloutier. I am Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue and Executive Director of the Val d'Or Native Friendship Centre. I am a proud Anishinabe from the Anishinabe Aki territory. I am very pleased to be part of this panel today and want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak.

[English]

I would like to introduce the rector of University of Quebec in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Mrs. Johanne Jean, who is in charge of the youngest university in the network of the University of Quebec. This institution primarily serves students in Abitibi-Témiscamingue and northern regions of Quebec.

Like all Canadian universities, UQAT offers a number of programs that enjoy an excellent reputation in other regions. It also employs 100 instructors and researchers, and serves a student population of 2,400, 200 of whom are aboriginal students. UQAT has worked with aboriginal people for the past 25 years. You heard from Mr. Blackned about some of the work that's been done with the Cree Nation. The aboriginal people have chosen the university as a partner in training their human resources.

We offer programs leading to certificates and bachelor's degrees in management, early childhood education, primary and secondary school teaching, and social work. Our training programs are delivered both in communities and at our aboriginal campus in Val

d'Or, in both English and French, based on the language spoken by the people from the communities as a second language, of course. To date, UQAT has granted 153 diplomas to Inuit, Cree, and Anishnabe Algonquin people.

[Translation]

I am going to continue in French, because that is my current reality.

We are honoured to have been invited to this forum to share our expertise regarding the challenges — and we heard the representatives of the Assembly of First Nations — involved in providing post-secondary training for Inuit and First Nations students.

Before discussing our approach and way of doing things, we would like to look at the profile of two students and draw a parallel between them. One is a non-Aboriginal student and the other, an Aboriginal student, both of whom are studying on the campus.

The first student we will call Louise Tremblay, and she is 22 years old. She is studying for a Bachelor's degree in early childhood education and primary school teaching. She has completed her college studies and is now in her second term at university. Today, she finished her last class at 4:00 p.m. She leaves the campus to go home to the apartment she shares with a flat mate. As she is running a nice hot bath to relax in, she turns on her computer to check her e-mail. Of course, a tasty dinner is simmering on the stove and she will need only two short hours to complete the work that has to be handed in the next day. Louise should have time to go out that evening to meet up with other students at the campus bistro.

The second student, whom we will call Bella Papatie, is 33 years old. She also finishes her classes and learning workshops at 4:00 p.m. She, too, is studying for a Bachelor's degree in early childhood education and primary school teaching, in a program whose curriculum has been adapted to First Nations culture. Bella worked in the daycare centre in her community of Kitcisakik, a village about 100 kilometres from Val d'Or, in the Laverendrye Wild Life Reserve. She dreams of one day teaching in a primary school in her community and wants to be legally qualified for that. Who knows? One day, she may go and teach in another community or in the city, when her children leave the reserve and enroll at a CEGEP. Her mother tongue is Algonquin. She learned French in primary school and it is more difficult for her to write in her second language than it is for the regular students. When she finishes her last class, Bella cannot go home to Kitcisakik immediately. She doesn't get to take a hot bath, or to turn her computer on: in her community, there is no running water, and no electricity. Everyone uses a small generator, and given the cost of fuel, it can be operated only a few hours each evening. Grandma puts a tasty dinner on to simmer on the wood stove, and looks after the children while waiting for Bella to come home. The house is small and is home to a family of 14 people: parents, children, grandparents and an elderly uncle. The fact that there are people everywhere means that Bella has no place where she can focus on her school work.

However, the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue has provided assistance for Bella, as part of its comprehensive project to ensure that its Aboriginal students succeed. Bella and her colleagues stay on campus after their last class ends. They meet with a teaching assistant who provides guidance for them in their learning and helps them with their work. They have access to documents translated into English, if they come from a community where the second language is English.

In addition, a psycho-social assistant familiar with Aboriginal culture and practices is available to help them, if they need it. The student life advisor refers her to the Native Friendship Centre for any services she or her family may require.

As for the teachers, they have agreed to take on several extra hours of work in order to provide personal assistance to the First Nations group. Thus the university guarantees that Bella will be able to complete her program successfully, and that she will be able to use her diploma to teach in Aboriginal communities or in any school board of her choice.

At about 6:00 p.m., Bella will be able to set off for Kitcisakik, knowing that she has completed the work and studies that her timetable requires. The evening will be devoted to her family and her community, for whom she is a role model.

● (0940)

[English]

Louise and Bella's parents were born in the late 1940s. Louise's parents were born in Val d'Or in the hospital, Bella's in the forest. In the early 1960s, Louise's parents' society experienced tremendous upheaval, later known as the quiet revolution. Louise's mother had her future planned for her. She would complete and graduate from grade 12 and become a school teacher or a nurse. Her father, in spite of his talent, would go to work in the mine.

Then the government changed how things worked and opened the doors of knowledge to them. Secondary education was offered throughout Quebec. A network of CÉGEPs was established, and with it the extensive Université du Québec network. Louise's parents became a doctor and an engineer. Quebec had equipped itself with the most formidable tool for development by ensuring that a large majority of their population would be educated.

Unfortunately—and it is not for us to judge the people who wrote the history of Canada—the aboriginal people received different treatment. Bella's parents did not have access to primary school until it was decided that all the children would be taken away from their parents to be educated, and more importantly, to try to assimilate them into the dominant culture. The residential schools established for them were a failure, and the first nations are still suffering the consequences. Everything has to be rebuilt, and time is running out.

I think my time is also running out, so I'll jump to the conclusion, because I would like Madame Jean to conclude this.

On the first nations pavilion of UQAT, I agreed to chair the board of directors because I believe this institution is a partner with first nations, so that the short-, medium-, and long-term vision meets the vision of first nations that this institution will be controlled by and for first nations. It is in that vision and in that future perspective that

we see this opportunity for our people to take over our own institutions and have educated first nations people take over in the future for us first nations people.

I would like to ask Madame Jean to conclude this.

Meegwetch.

● (0945)

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Jean (President, University of Quebec in Abitibi-Témiscamingue): Thank you very much for inviting me. I will be brief.

I would like to draw a parallel with what Edith has just said. The project undertaken at the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue takes us back to the beginning of the Quiet Revolution. In the 1960s, the Université du Québec network was established in Quebec. Its purpose was to increase graduation rates and the level of education among Francophone Quebecers. Institutions were created all across Quebec and the network was expanded, making university training accessible to as many people as possible in Quebec.

The UQAT will celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2008. We have met some of our goals, but some have yet to be attained. During the Quiet Revolution of Quebec, we created this network and began by training our own teachers. After that, we trained our own social workers, our own psycho-educators, our own managers, and our own nurses. Several years later, the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue trained engineers and professional foresters. We began a second phase when we introduced Master's and Ph.D. level training.

In Abitibi-Témiscamingue, when the Université du Québec network was first created, we had to call on French cooperants because there were not enough university professors in Quebec. So we brought people from France to Abitibi-Témiscamingue. Many of them still work with us.

I'm trying to draw a parallel here with the project to develop a First Nations Pavilion at the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue — something we would like to develop in cooperation with the First Nations, with a view to raising their level of education.

Ms. Bastien referred earlier to the high-school dropout rate. In that connection, it is important to introduce Aboriginal role models and properly trained teachers into First Nations communities. These are First Nations people who will subsequently practice their profession in their own community and will serve as role models. Only then will we be able to break the vicious cycle and ensure that after two or three decades, there will be enough Aboriginal teachers, graduates and professionals.

One very important dimension of this project — and Edith referred to it earlier — is the possibility for First Nations to take control. We want to be sure we have Aboriginal staff and that we can train them, because some Aboriginal teachers go away to get their diploma but come back home later to practice their profession.

As we did with the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, we want to ensure that after two or three decades, the First Nations will be in a position to take over all of these institutions, including those providing university training.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll start the questioning with the Liberal side. Madam Neville.

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

I want to thank all of you very much for coming here this morning. The presentations were certainly fulsome.

I particularly want to thank you, Ms. Cloutier, for your portrayal of the differences between an aboriginal and a non-aboriginal student, and the challenges they have.

I'm interested in the whole concept of a post-secondary first nations institution, and I appreciate what the university is doing. Do you have a model in mind of what you would like to create in Quebec? Have you begun discussions with the Quebec government? Have you begun discussions with the federal government? What are the jurisdictional challenges you see in making something happen?

● (0950)

Ms. Lise Bastien: First of all, we have a project on the table, and it's pretty well developed. We are giving a certificate that we developed ourselves in first nations leadership. We developed the whole concept, and we have an agreement with Saint Paul University.

The project is with a post-secondary institution. This means we would like to have the college and some services in the university. It might be a certificate or a micro-program. We also have a technology program of 15 credits that we give with Montreal University.

This institution will, first of all, give college. I think it's important to build this. We have the project; everything is there. We are working with two colleges: Dawson, and maybe also Abitibi-Témiscamingue. Because we have French and English in Quebec, we need to deal with two institutions. So everything is there.

As for jurisdiction, we are in negotiations with the college, NAQ, the province, and the federal government. At the beginning, we need accreditation by a college. But we hope that within ten years we're

going to have full jurisdiction over the institution. They know about this, and they are really open.

So I think everything is there. We will be ready to start in September 2008. We are in negotiations on the budget.

We want to start with small groups. It would be impossible to start a project like this, delivering quality education, with a big group of students. Also, we want to keep the standards high. It is important for us to send the message to our first nations people that we deserve high-quality education, and that we have the capacity to cope with it.

Over the past years, we have to blame ourselves and post-secondary institutions for giving low-quality services. They were giving a certificate or diploma, but the students who went through these institutions didn't have the same capacity at the end as the other groups. So they were building a baccalaureate with a lower quality.

These people who come back and work in our communities are giving poor-quality services. I think it's important to send the message that we are not inferior, that we are able to have quality services. We have good people in our community. Gilbert mentioned potential. We want to work with students who have potential. We want to build on that. Maybe we'll start with a small group of 20 or 40 students for the first year. It doesn't matter. It might cost a bit more at the beginning, but after five years I'm sure the message will cross the communities and the students will be proud to attend this first nations institution.

● (0955)

So that's it. I hope I answered your question.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

Do I have time, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: Yes, you have a couple of minutes.

Hon. Anita Neville: I'm interested in knowing what your discussions are with the Quebec and federal governments, and what the jurisdictional challenges are for you.

Mr. Gilbert Whiteduck: In our case, as indicated, we see the first step as being a partnership with existing CÉGEPs in Quebec. While we're developing our capacity to manage a college, we are going to begin dialogue with the Quebec government to have our institution fully recognized. We know there are a number of steps to make that happen.

In regard to the federal government, there hasn't been a lot of interest in engaging in this, even in regard to providing some preliminary money. Only a little bit of money has been put forward, which is unfortunate, because we've produced what we think is the best thinking we have on this to move it forward; here is a fine example of a kind of collaboration that can produce results if given the opportunity.

I have one comment in regard to what Lise was indicating. McGill University, for example, for a number of years has been providing a teacher training program. It's a four-year B.Ed. with all the same credits, except that if you go through the native program and you graduate, your certification only allows you to teach first nations students. The Quebec government does not recognize that same diploma with the same credits because it's a first nations program. It makes no sense. These programs, delivered for the most part in the community, cost big dollars to deliver, yet at the end of the day the student is limited to teaching first nations students or to teaching on reserve. There's something wrong with that. That's the kind of thing we're hoping to correct and get to the bottom of.

The Chair: Thank you.

We go to the Bloc. Monsieur Lemay is next.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Thank you.

I learn something new every day. I wouldn't say that I'm stunned by what you have told us, Mr. Whiteduck, but I am surprised. I have been carefully reading the brief you tabled with the Committee. There is one thing I would like you to clarify on page 7.

First Nations have special needs when it comes to education. Band management, band administration [...]

You mentioned all the criteria, which I see as being critical. As part of the project you are currently developing, do you believe you could provide training that would be geared to the needs of First Nations people? If need be, could you begin to do that in the coming months, over the coming year, by the end of 2008, or prior to that?

Ms. Lise Bastien: The project is actually scheduled to begin in September 2008. The job of adapting course material should begin very soon, in either December or January. We will be looking at content. In terms of band management and administration, the economy, languages and culture, it is entirely possible to adapt the course material. We have a very good grasp of the content.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I have a specific question. I was wondering whether I should ask it, but I have decided that I will. You are planning to teach courses in French in Abitibi-Témiscamingue if you are able to reach an appropriate agreement with the Abitibi-Témiscamingue CEGEP. So, we're talking about one region. The courses in English would be given at Dawson College — and heaven knows we've heard a lot about Dawson College in recent weeks — in the heart of Montreal. I'd like to get additional details about that.

•(1000)

Ms. Lise Bastien: I could send you all the material about the project. We are currently looking for a place to teach the courses. We are not required to use the premises of the two CEGEPs working with us, who will be checking to see that we meet the standards and giving us the appropriate accreditation, among other things.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I understand. So, you will sign an agreement with the Abitibi-Témiscamingue CEGEP or Dawson College, but the courses could actually be taught in Kanasatake or Kanahwake, for example.

Ms. Lise Bastien: That's correct.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I understand now.

Ms. Lise Bastien: They will be taught in the same place, both in English and French.

M. Marc Lemay: It would certainly be inappropriate for me not to ask a question about the Université du Québec. The other Committee members and myself would like to get more information about this. My question will be along the same lines as the one Ms. Neville asked.

You have a project called the First Nations Pavilion. What is the current status of negotiations with the federal and provincial governments with respect to implementing that project? I imagine this is something new. Can you give us additional details in that regard?

Ms. Edith Cloutier: The important feature of this project is that it will have a unifying effect. By that I mean that the project reflects a desire on the part of both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. It has been in discussion for four years now. Everyone taking part in those discussions is well aware of the project, at both the provincial and federal levels.

Last week, I met with the Quebec Minister of Education. For the time being, the discussions revolve around the First Nations Socio-economic Forum which will be held next week. Quebec has pledged to fund 50% of the construction costs of a building that will cost some \$8 million. The non-Aboriginal community has raised \$1.5 million. Of that amount, a half-million dollars will go to the construction *per se*, and the other million dollars will be used for development and research.

So, the ball is now in the federal court. For now, people at Indian Affairs are saying they cannot fund 50% of the construction costs of the pavilion. In addition, \$1.2 million is needed to maintain services that have already been developed and which, in most cases, involve Aboriginal staff.

In our discussions with him last week, Mr. Fournier pledged to invest \$350,000 this year in support of the service offer. In this case as well, we have gone back to Indian Affairs. They are telling us they don't have adequate funds.

I would like to ask Johanne to add her own comments.

Ms. Johanne Jean: I think you have pretty well covered everything.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chairman?

[English]

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: My question is for Mr. Blackned.

In your opinion, what is the main obstacle preventing an Aboriginal student from pursuing his or her studies at the college or university level?

[English]

Mr. Gordon Blackned: Thank you for your question, Mr. Lemay.

The main difficulty for a student is adjusting to a strange environment that they're not really accustomed to. We keep our children in our communities up to secondary five. Some of them graduate at different ages, maybe at 17 or 18, while others are a little older but we continue to keep them in our school until they graduate.

In some cases, most of them will not go on to post-secondary education because of the fear within that they are going to be faced with something totally different from their environment. I think the social adjustments are also another problem.

On top of that, you're looking at schools that are isolated. The education itself in those schools is viewed and perceived as lower-quality instruction. And because of the fact as well that our Cree language is strong, we also teach both second languages, French and English, and sometimes a third language in certain schools. So we have the mother tongue Cree, a second language English, and a third language French, although it could be vice versa in some of the schools.

So there are a number of factors, but from personal experience, I have pinpointed it to the social adjustment to a strange environment. That's pretty well the main problem that we're faced with. Like I said before, we would probably resolve it if we were to bring home some programs within our Cree communities or within the territory that we live in.

• (1005)

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Madam Crowder.

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

I want to thank the participants for coming and eloquently describing not only some of the suggestions and recommendations, but also the conditions.

I'm going to start with a statement.

Mr. Whiteduck, I believe, referenced that we've had years and years of studies. The barriers are well identified. When I ask my specific questions, I wonder if you could think about why it is that we have not been able to act on some of those recommendations and studies that have been so well documented.

I have a couple of questions, and I'm not sure who would be the ones to answer.

In British Columbia we have a system of university colleges, which is an attempt to bring education down to community levels. The university college offers a range of vocational, technical, literacy, and university programs. I heard Mr. Whiteduck—or perhaps it was Mr. Blackned—say that students who don't get access to vocational training in high school don't have access. I wonder if somebody could comment on what needs to be done in

order to give first nations and other aboriginal students access to vocational programs. That's one question.

The second question is if you're talking about a first nations college or university, I assume there would be a structural location somewhere in a community, but you still would have the challenge of having students needing to relocate from their communities, because it's such a vast territory. I wonder if you could talk about what would be needed to support those students, either in their own communities or in relocating.

Jump in, anybody.

Mr. Gilbert Whiteduck: In regard to vocational, I should point out that I have an old letter in front of me, dated 1972, in which Treasury Board had informed INAC that they could fund students at the vocational level. In those days they didn't call it post-secondary, they called it post-school.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Can you provide us with a copy of that letter?

Mr. Gilbert Whiteduck: Sure. It gives an idea.

In Quebec, as I mentioned, vocational training is given at the high school level. Usually all you need is a secondary four or grade ten to access it, unlike in other provinces, where you normally need post-secondary. Our recommendation would be that the post-secondary program incorporate the opportunity to access funding to go to vocational, because of the particular situation in Quebec. That certainly would alleviate it and create opportunities for the students in this area.

Mr. Gordon Blackned: To add to what Mr. Whiteduck is saying, I think you pointed to the fact that we're such a vast territory. The Cree territory is like that; we're spread out quite extensively. The problem we're faced with is what you're saying—relocating people from one community to another. A year or so ago we opened a training centre that was provided to us by the Ministry of Education in the community of Waswanipi. It's a central location for the inland groups, but it's quite a distance from the coastal community. The problem we're faced with is relocating those people. Again, the adjustment aspect comes into play. They're living in a community that's more or less strange to them. The dialect is different. Even some of the relationships are not that close between the communities, and that affects their education. Some last for a little while; some will last for the duration of the vocational training program.

In the Cree territory we've now evolved to the level where we have a training centre, but we're looking at a satellite type of arrangement where we can offer programs in our own communities by satellite. It might be interesting to note here as well that the Cree Nation is submitting a proposal to the governments for a Cree CÉGEP. We've already done a feasibility study on a CÉGEP; we've been looking at it over the last ten years. But because our communities are very spread out, there would not be a possibility of us building a structure to accommodate the training that's involved in a CÉGEP. We're looking at working with a recognized CÉGEP within the territory and putting in a satellite arrangement.

•(1010)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Jean: I'd like to answer your question about location.

The Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue serves the entire vast area of Abitibi-Témiscamingue, as well as Northern Quebec — in other words, about two thirds of the province. We have developed strategies to make a university education accessible to as many people as possible. For more than 25 years now, we have been working with First Nations communities. When communities ask us to provide part-time training — for instance, a certificate in administration or management sciences — we go right into the community. We have provided and continue to provide training in a great many communities, including Waswanipi, Oujé-Bougoumou, Chisasibi and Mistassini.

In the last few years, for example, we have been offering a Bachelor of Social Work program. We began with a cohort of 50 Cree students, 45 of whom received their diploma. A Bachelor-level program normally lasts three years, but it took us seven years to teach the program in nine Cree communities. We would set aside a certain number of days in a month to teach the students. The teachers, teaching assistants and support staff would go into a specific community, and then move on to another one the following month. The program was offered in nine communities over a seven-year period. We also provided training in Val d'Or and Rouyn-Noranda.

As Mr. Bagnell was saying, there are other strategies as well, such as distance learning and videoconferencing.

The UQAT has chosen to provide full-time training in Val d'Or, because it is located in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue—Northern Quebec region. It is a normal channel. First Nations communities have access to a range of services in Val d'Or. Edith could probably provide additional information in that regard.

We are not claiming to offer a solution for the province as a whole. I'm simply talking about what we are doing in our area of Abitibi-Témiscamingue and Northern Quebec.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Blaney is next.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): I would like to welcome our witnesses from the Aboriginal education sector. My parents are teachers, and your presentation this morning has been a real source of inspiration.

Education is at the very heart of economic development among First Nations. Indeed, next week, a number of us will be in Mashteuiatsh to attend the First Nations Socio-economic Forum. Education will be a major focus at the Forum since the entire morning on Thursday — the main day of the Forum — will be devoted to that theme. We are anxious to work in partnership with the First Nations and the Government of Quebec to explore different avenues that could help us to improve training.

My first question is addressed to our experts from the First Nations Education Council. Our Committee has been looking

closely at post-secondary education and we are realizing that there are important barriers. I'd like to know what you are intending to do to encourage more First Nations students to attend the institutions you want to establish.

•(1015)

Ms. Lise Bastien: Thank you.

What is most important is a strong connection with the community. At the present time, provincial universities and colleges are not in tune with the needs of First Nations, whereas our organizations maintain an ongoing relationship with them. It's us, basically.

The college established by the First Nations Education Council will belong to 22 communities. Right off the bat, communities will promote and value their young people's participation in this college's programs. Of course, this is an alternative, as opposed to a panacea or a solution that can fit everyone's needs. So, it won't be a problem attracting as many students as possible.

Mr. Blaney mentioned that there are a number of facets to post-secondary education. We do not believe there is a single solution. We must consider as many alternatives as possible in order to reach as many students as possible. What is most attractive about our project, is that the college will be for First Nations only. We will have to prove ourselves in the first few years.

On the other hand, at the university level, we do offer a Certificate in Aboriginal Leadership. It is open to everyone. We see value in allowing First Nations and non-Aboriginal Canadians to come together and exchange views. It is interesting to see the reaction of non-Aboriginal students to what we tell them about our history as part of a program designed by First Nations. It results in very interesting exchanges. We hope that this will improve relations.

Mr. Steven Blaney: I understand. Having Aboriginal post-secondary institutions may be a way of saying that from kindergarten all the way up to high school, there are opportunities.

Mr. Gilbert Whiteduck: We have to improve the quality of education at the primary and secondary levels, to ensure that students have the appropriate academic background. We need to give them a solid secondary level program, so that they have the necessary prerequisites to pursue their studies at the post-secondary level, without having to take a transition program.

[*English*]

We spoke about role models and their importance. It's very important that young people see young role models. As a matter of fact, yesterday 12 youth role models were named, and the Governor General made presentations to them. I attended that. There was so much pride, and other young people were there seeing what these young people were doing and how successful they had been. Our young people within the community need to get a feel for that, but we have to have a solid secondary school.

I know this committee has been looking at elementary and secondary, but I'm saying we've got to build the base in order to work at the upper level later on. We have to give hope to people that when they go, they will have the prerequisites. The challenge is already difficult and challenging enough socially; if you're at an academic disadvantage, it is even more difficult.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney: Thank you. I have a question for our friends who are behind the Abitibi project.

What role will this project play in developing the university? I am thinking in particular of attendance levels and mechanisms you have developed to properly integrate First Nations students. How does that fit in with your plans for developing your institution?

• (1020)

Ms. Johanne Jean: As I mentioned in passing a little earlier, we have been working with First Nations communities for more than 25 years. In the last five years, we have increased the number of interventions, in response to requests we have received. Of course, in our area, we deal mainly with Crees and Algonquins. Together with First Nations communities, our institution has decided to take up this challenge.

We have chosen to do so in a special way in the community of Val d'Or. Our project there — which is already underway — involves providing full-time training aimed primarily at First Nations communities in Val d'Or, in cooperation with them. In terms of strategy, other universities obviously operate differently, but we have decided to form groups made up solely of students from First Nations communities who, depending on what their second or third working language is, will study either in French or in English.

You asked us how we could increase access to, or attendance at, primary, secondary and post-secondary institutions. At the present time, we are training a lot of teachers. We believe there is a need to reintroduce into these communities teachers who have been properly trained and have the same diplomas as any other graduate. This is important, and this is one of the rules that we have adopted.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'll let Madame Cloutier go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Edith Cloutier: I would just like to add to that answer by specifically mentioning the Université du Québec's strategic plan. The last plan that I agreed to work on, as a member of the Board of Directors, takes its inspiration from the principle of developing services for the First Nations by devoting a university pavilion to them, with a view to allowing First Nations to eventually take control. After formulating that strategic plan, we developed a strategic intervention plan by establishing a committee of First Nations people whose specific task was to define the vision that would inform the First Nations Pavilion.

Based on that strategic plan, we held consultations all across the Anishnabe territory in both Algonquin and Cree communities. I presented the project to the chiefs of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, who voiced their support for this initiative. We made a joint commitment to it in anticipation of the socio-economic forum; we are mobilizing the main stakeholders with a

view to garnering their support for this visionary project which could, of course, lead to great things as far as education is concerned.

At the same time, we obviously hope that the expertise developed across that entire area by the University of Quebec and the First Nations will be exportable, so to speak, to other areas of the country. I believe there is a significant need out there. However, there is no one solution, as Lise was saying. A number of tools have to be made available to the First Nations. The Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, or UQAT, and First Nations people are prepared to share that expertise.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Merasty is next.

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): First, let me thank you again for your presentation.

A big part of addressing the first nations education question in this country has forced us to focus on debunking myths. As a grand chief for six years before I got elected here, one of my biggest struggles was trying to take the attention away from the myths that are perpetuated with quantitative reports that don't look at the qualitative aspects and don't look at the successes of first nations programs.

The myth says the provinces do a better job, that the gap is our fault, our community's fault, our students' fault, that our students are less academic. As a result, it takes the focus away from the successes happening in our communities. This is what's been most troublesome for me over the years.

An elder told me once that if you focus on poverty, you'll achieve poverty; if you focus on prosperity, you'll achieve prosperity. And because these stats are sensationalized, it causes governments and others to focus on the poverty or the bad news in these reports.

I'm very happy you talked about the successes you've achieved in each of your organizations. In the context of Saskatchewan, my home province, I know our teacher education program—TEP—our native law centre, the aboriginal MBA program, are all experiencing graduation rates of 90% or so. The importance of the culture match to the students and the extension into the community speaks volumes to the model we should look at.

Mr. Whiteduck talked about student support, the PSSP, and institutional support, the ISSP. And I've been told, "Gary, don't focus on the money", but I think the solutions are in the community, and we have to empower the communities to be able to share and activate these solutions.

Without realizing or understanding that, if you have a graph, our population is going at a 45-degree angle from the corner of this graph, and the funding has been going like this. So the gap grows every year, because we have a population group. What will happen if we don't fund the current models we have, the PSSP and the ISSP? For you to continue the success you have, what will happen if that funding isn't increased?

● (1025)

Mr. Gilbert Whiteduck: I'm pleased you brought the issue of success to our attention, because we've had many successes, both in programs that have been delivered and by the many young people who have returned to the community to take on some very important roles. We need to celebrate that, and too often, you're right, we forget and we look very much on the negative side.

But if the funding is not increased to allow students to pursue vocational training, post-secondary education of one kind or another, what I see from my travels into my own community is that the social issues and the social turmoil in our communities is not going to get better. What's going to occur is we're going to be leading into more and more confrontation, because people at one point are going to have to react. I believe you'll be hearing more of roadblocks or whatever. How else do you get attention? People are saying that is not what we want. We'd rather put our energies into something that's going to work and work toward that, but when you don't have a choice, you tell me what you do.

I sat on the national working group on education under Minister Nault, and we concluded there were 6,000 reports on first nations education in this country.

You're right, the solutions are found with the community. Our organization and the communities are prepared to work with INAC to move forward meaningfully, to find solutions that are going to work, to celebrate and keep talking about the positive, to keep looking forward, and not looking at what's lacking, but looking at the potential we need to draw upon.

Mr. Gary Merasty: One of the successful models I've seen out there is to bring the post-secondary institutions closer to the community. This was a statement that was made by I think virtually all of you. This extension is absolutely critical because of the population growth, and because some of our aboriginal institutions or the institutions in partnership with first nations, such as the Cree School Board and the James Bay Cree, are at the doorstep of these communities. We're at the doorstep of the communities, and I see giving the first experience in post-secondary education as close to the community as we can as such an effective model to launch them into the mainstream, if I can use that term.

We need to look at this a bit more. When you do this, you identify and ensure a cultural match, you help alleviate some of the stresses from moving away from home, plus you introduce what it is to be in post-secondary.

My question, though, is this. We have HRSD, which does the vocational or the technical, and we have INAC, which does the PSSP, and they don't necessarily talk. It's not necessarily the fault of any government now or in the past, but I see that this connection needs to occur.

Can you elaborate a bit more on how important that is as we move forward?

● (1030)

The Chair: Would you be fairly brief in answering that question? We're running over on the time allotted.

Ms. Lise Bastien: I think it's really important to have that discussion between different ministries, but we've been talking about this for a long time as first nations to ministries, and it doesn't happen. We can't wait, if they don't want to talk to each other. It's the same thing with Industry Canada and Indian Affairs when they talk about technology in schools.

So I think it's really important that this discussion happen, but meanwhile we need to find a solution for immediate projects. It's really important. We started discussion at the community level and regional level, and we are talking to each other, and we favour these discussions between services and programs. I think it's really important and more efficient.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Bruinooge.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to also thank everyone for coming out this morning. It's always good to get a perspective from every region, and I think we've done a very good job today in finding representation from the province of Quebec.

If I have enough time, and I'm not sure I do, I'd like to ask a question to each group, if possible. I'll start with Mr. Whiteduck.

You spoke a bit about building the base and having the right academic qualifications to succeed. I want to have you expand upon some of the factors you think need to be in place to accentuate that base, perhaps to ensure that students are able to seamlessly move into the post-secondary school of their choice, be it one with a first nations cultural sense to it, or perhaps another one in the United States, or wherever they choose to go to study. Could you expand on that?

Mr. Gilbert Whiteduck: I could speak at length about that, but let me give you a few examples that I believe are important. First of all, we need to address the issue of the funding support going to primary and secondary education. We need to look at the whole funding formula to ensure that teachers are paid at par, so that you can recruit the best-qualified teachers and do some work at the community level. We in the FNEC, like Minister Prentice, have been talking about second-level services. They are essential in ensuring that the standards and the quality in first nations schools are at par. We hope that the new government is prepared to move on this. It will reinforce what's already been going on in first nations schools. There's been some good work in first nations schools. It's just that there's a lot more that needs to be done. I'm hoping that people are prepared to move forward.

In preparing for a socio-economic forum, we put forward what we believed was a major proposal for moving to second-level services, only to be told that the new government wasn't necessarily prepared to move as quickly as we wanted to. We saw this as a unique opportunity to put in place the templates, accountability mechanisms, and community support necessary to prepare our young people to make the transition. When we talk about our own first nations institutions, all we're saying is that we want to give our young people a choice. It doesn't mean they're going to go to the first nations institution, and that's fine. If they choose to go mainstream, their sense of identity will be stronger. This is the key. When they leave the community, if their sense of identity is threatened in any way, a lot of them will come right back. We think stronger high school level, stronger preparation, will allow for a transition to be made more easily and for people to see that there are opportunities.

I am talking about the on-reserve situation, but many first nations students attend provincial schools. So there's quite a bit of work to be done within the provincial schools. The success rate at the high schools in the province is not all that much better than what's going on in the community. So a dialogue with the ministry of education, certainly in Quebec, is critical. The federal government needs to be there to come and push the movement forward.

• (1035)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Blackned, within your community, is there any tracking of graduates who move into the workforce? Is there any sense of the success rate in various vocations? Is there an opportunity out there for the majority of graduates from your community?

Mr. Gordon Blackned: I don't think there is per se a tracking arrangement for our post-secondary students. We try to guide them to training, university, or college programs that would gear them to positions required within the Cree territory, like teachers or medical people. But the fields our students graduate in are not necessarily the ones they go into for jobs or careers.

Our communities are small. The economic development of our communities is not large enough to accommodate positions related to the training they've received. So you will encounter accountants and such without jobs. We are getting people in positions that their training hasn't prepared them for.

As for the jobs that exist in our communities, take the teacher training program. It is the responsibility of the Cree School Board.

Under the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, the school board is supposed to train Cree teachers. We've developed many teachers. A lot of them have gone into our schools and taught. Others have gone off into other jobs. There is no consistency in training. When you get through your program, there is no guarantee there is going to be a job available. This is a problem we face in our territory.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, could I just have one more short question?

The Chair: No, I'm sorry.

We'll have Mr. Lévesque, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Now you understand why I am so proud to represent the people of the riding of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, as well as my constituency Abitibi-Témiscamingue, which is where the President is from.

I should also make Committee members aware of the fact that with us today is Mr. Lemire, who was previously the Executive Director of the Regional Abitibi-Témiscamingue Development Board and who, as early as the 1980s, understood the need to acknowledge, nation to nation, an entire society's participation in this country's economic development.

I had the honour of working with Mr. Lemire, and I want to convey my greetings. I also want to convey my greetings to Mr. Blackned, who gave us the benefit of his time and his culture, and even sacrificed his time hunting, to come and appear before the Committee today. I hope he brought us a moose.

I also want to convey greetings to Edith.

I travel from the east coast of my riding, which is the coast of Labrador, to the western end on the border of the province of Quebec. In my riding, there are Algonquins, Abenakis, Atikamekw, Cree, Inuit and Naskapis. All of them are proud workers who are only asking to have the tools they need to develop. Indeed, with the few tools we have provided the Cree — not all of them, but some of them, at least — Canada and Quebec — yes, that's what I said — will develop much more quickly than they are now.

I have had dealings with Mr. Blackned and with the Université du Québec. I know that there is no information on this, but based on your knowledge of the education sector, could Mr. Blackned tell us how many students are unable to pursue post-secondary studies because they have to leave their home and their culture? And of those who do leave, how many come back to their community to work?

How much does it cost the Cree School Board when students decide to pursue their studies outside the community?

• (1040)

[English]

Mr. Gordon Blackned: That's a good question. I don't have statistics with me right now. I'll have to go from memory here.

The percentage of graduates who do go out to post-secondary institutions—secondary five graduates—I would say is around 40% to 50% at the outset. As I said, others will wait maybe a year, two years, three years before they pursue post-secondary studies. Of those who go out and eventually graduate with a specific discipline, 100% will come back to the community. They will eventually find a job suitable to them, or something related to that, but most of the time, as I said, it won't be related unless they specifically take particular programs like the teacher training program I was talking about.

To board and educate children away from their home communities is very expensive; it is quite a lot of money to invest. There were concerns raised here regarding the level of funding being received by post-secondary students. I think first nations are faced with that problem across the country.

We in the Cree School Board are also faced with that funding problem. We constantly receive requests from our students for additional funds, because in certain localities where they're located to study, it's very difficult for them to find accommodations. Because they're first nations, for one thing, sometimes the landlords turn them away. The other aspect is difficulty finding areas to lease or rent for the duration of their studies, because of an influx of larger populations of non-native students who would be coming into a particular community.

I have relatives who have gone out this fall. Some of them have had to relocate; after a week or two of searching for an apartment or something like that, they've had to go to another city to take up their studies, because that's where they were able to find accommodation for the time that they would be studying. In that regard, it does cost a lot of money for travel. In our territory, travel costs are astronomical because of the distance our students have to travel.

But in the long run, when you look at the percentage of 40% to 50% going out to study, and then 100% coming back to fulfill their obligations to the community in whatever capacity they can, it is quite a considerable success for us.

• (1045)

The Chair: Mr. Albrecht is next.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to each of the participants today.

I have a few general questions, but I'm going to try to focus in on some of the more specific ones.

Mr. Whiteduck, you mentioned that a cap of 2% per year has been in place since 1997. Can you help me understand a bit about the timing and rationale for that? Also, how does it compare to funding for non-aboriginal people at the post-secondary level in Canada? Do you know? I don't have any idea what it is.

Mr. Gilbert Whiteduck: Well, what occurred was that at the beginning of the 1990s there was a decision not to work on a regional need.

The regional Indian Affairs office would determine what the need was, and then the funding would be provided to the region within an envelope. It got frozen, and then all that was going to be given was 2% per year for cost of living—basically, barely—so it wasn't keeping up with the demographics and the needs. Communities were given envelopes to work within; if they ran out of money, then there was a priority list of who would have access. Continuing students would continue to be funded, and what not. It made it very challenging, because now it was the community that had to tell a student who may have left. A young woman may have gotten pregnant and had to leave; when she wants to return a year or two later, she has to be told she's on the waiting list. That creates frustration, and they often give up.

In regard to what funding is available to non-first-nations students, I'm not so clear about that, because the program is obviously administered differently.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Could I just follow up, as well? I'm beginning to learn a little more about the educational needs of the aboriginal community as well as of the other provinces.

I'm not from Quebec. You mentioned that vocational training in Quebec is offered at the high school level and that there's no access to post-secondary education in terms of vocational skills at the college level. Can you just expand on that? I'm having trouble understanding. What does the college level then provide for aboriginal students?

Mr. Gilbert Whiteduck: The college level would offer pre-university.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: But there is no vocational school.

Mr. Gilbert Whiteduck: Well, there is. For example, there is nursing, technology, three-year programs, and what not. When I'm speaking about vocational, it might be carpentry. It might be some of the other skills. Algonquin College, here in Ottawa, offers all of those at the post-secondary level. So students who want to go.... It's odd, because those first nations communities that are on the border with Ontario are able to send their students to them and have that funded under post-secondary. Those that are further are unable to do so.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Okay, that's helpful.

And finally, if I could have another half a minute, Ms. Bastien, you mentioned that during your time in education there was an institution that was specifically for aboriginal people, and it was closed. Could you just give me a bit of a history of that?

Ms. Lise Bastien: It was called Manitou College. It was near Montreal, between Montreal and Maniwaki. It lasted about five years. It gave college degrees. And it was quite interesting, because for the first time in our lives, we were Mi'kmaq, Mohawk, Huron, and Algonquin young people all at the same place. We didn't know each other, because at that time communication and transportation wasn't the same. I'm talking about 30 years ago. So it was really new and challenging for us, because for the first time we met people who had the same reality. I didn't know that Mi'kmaq existed in Nova Scotia, so I met interesting people with the same challenges. And I learned English.

I had opportunity. I attended only one year, because they decided to close the college.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: That's the question. On what basis was the decision made? Was it lack of enrollment or lack of funding?

Ms. Lise Bastien: No. Well, I think, you know, it was a political decision. This is my opinion, but it is also the opinion of a lot of people. Our people at the college were becoming more active politically, and I think some people were afraid of that, because we were really political. And this was a college; this was the place where you form and learn about your political.... You know, this is

really the place where your social culture is in development. So I think it was really a place to create people who would disturb some institutions.

• (1050)

Mr. Gilbert Whiteduck: I should note that irony of ironies, this had been an old Bismarck missile base that had been turned over to first nations, and first nations had come because they saw this opportunity, and then they were asked to leave and the funding came to an end. But lo and behold, today I believe that it has become a medium or a minimum security prison where there are many first nations. The irony is that had it remained open, a lot of these people could very well not be in that institution.

The Chair: Before I close, the chair would just like to make a comment, and that is that when I was back in my constituency, I visited Okanagan College. One very innovative thing they've done to help with trades training is that they have three mobile units. They have one for welding, one for plumbing, and one for electrical. They travel between the colleges. We have a whole valley of colleges. There are four campuses, and they rotate so they don't saturate the market. It is working really well. That's something you might want to look at for your area, because they can come right to the community, and if you have space they can unload the equipment and what not and run the programs. I think that's a real opportunity.

Thank you very much to the witnesses for your presentation today. And thank you, committee.

The meeting is adjourned.

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