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Chair

Mr. Colin Mayes

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• (0910)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC)): I will open the meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development for Thursday, November 23, 2006.

Committee members, you have the orders of the day before you. Once again, we'll be reviewing Bill C-292, An Act to implement the Kelowna Accord.

The witnesses today are from the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, with Patrick Brazeau. We have the National Association of Friendship Centres, with Vera Pawis Tabobondung, president; Peter Dinsdale, executive director. And we have the Native Womens Association of Canada, with Sherry Lewis, executive director.

I see Sherry is not here yet, but we can get started.

Mr. Brazeau, is the gentleman beside you part of your delegation?

Chief Patrick Brazeau (National Chief, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples): Yes.

The Chair: Will he be speaking?

Chief Patrick Brazeau: I don't believe so.

The Chair: Okay. Could you identify him for the record?

Chief Patrick Brazeau: Bob Groves.

The Chair: Welcome.

We're going to give the witnesses an opportunity to speak for ten minutes, and then we will be asking questions.

A few of our Liberal colleagues are a little late. They had a caucus meeting. I'm sure they'll be wandering in, in a few minutes.

Mr. Brazeau, we would like to start with you, please.

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Why are they not here, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: There are some troublemakers in the House.

An hon. member: Who's a troublemaker?

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Nation, nation...

[English]

Okay, it's a joke. We can stop, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Mr. Brazeau.

[Translation]

Chief Patrick Brazeau: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am pleased to speak this morning about the concept of nation. I thank you for having invited us to discuss with you Bill C-292.

[English]

To begin with, I want you and your colleagues to know that I'm a vigorous proponent of meaningful debate in respect of bringing about real improvements to the aboriginal quality of life in this country. I hope my remarks will serve to inform you as you deliberate this proposed legislation.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Could you please talk more slowly, so that the interpreters can keep up?

[English]

Chief Patrick Brazeau: As I am certain many honourable members may have questions to ask and comments to make, I will keep my remarks brief.

The Kelowna accord was introduced in the last moments of the last days of the last government. It is important to look at it for what it is and for what it is not.

The first ministers meeting in Kelowna, held almost exactly one year ago, was the culmination of a process that began in April 2004 through the convening of the Canada aboriginal peoples round table process. This undertaking was a significant one and was an effort that sought to avoid the prescriptive "made in Ottawa" approach to aboriginal affairs, which has virtually ensured the failure of previous attempts at dealing with the reform of Canada's aboriginal affairs.

A new approach was called for, one that promised collaboration, cooperation, and accommodation. I cannot sit before this committee and say that our organization did not welcome this news at that time. In our view, there is no aspiration more noble than to commit to ending aboriginal poverty.

There can be no better goal than to ensure that all of Canada's aboriginal peoples are able to stake their share in our nation's abundant prosperity. We all have an obligation to provide hope for our youth and the next generation of aboriginal peoples to come. Given this, we must end the rhetoric and act now.

On the basis of this promised partnership with the government of the day, and with the full hope that the congress and its member communities would be equal participants in this historic undertaking, we set forth on an 18-month process that promised to yield results for a generation. Thus, at least at the outset, what Kelowna was to CAP was an offer of inclusion and accommodation and a pursuit that aimed to rise above partisan politics, both at the parliamentary level and across the aboriginal horizon in conjunction with the five national aboriginal organizations.

CAP also viewed the round table process and the first ministers meeting as an opportunity for outreach and education to politicians and officials alike, providing them with the facts around the off-reserve, including status, non-status, and Métis realities in respect of Canada's aboriginal affairs.

The numbers around this constituency are very telling. I'd like to share them with you today, as I have been doing for months now, and will continue to do with other parliamentarians, senior officials across the bureaucracy, and members of the parliamentary press gallery.

The Government of Canada census indicates that 79% of Canada's aboriginal people live off reserves. Of the status Indian population, 51% live off reserves. Yet, despite these figures, out of the over \$9 billion spent yearly by the federal government on aboriginal programming and services, for every \$8 spent on reserve, only \$1 is spent off reserve.

Surely the Canada aboriginal peoples round table process would have addressed this. Certainly the investments that were to have flowed from the Kelowna commitments would have reflected this obvious demographic reality. The answer to both of those questions is, sadly, no.

In fact, 90% of the so-called funding commitments were to benefit primarily on-reserve peoples. What Kelowna sought to do was to throw more money at a system that has failed first nations people for over 130 years. The fact remains that off-reserve, non-status, and Métis peoples outside the so-called homelands are equally legitimate and deserving of the same degree of attention and accommodation.

Poverty, sickness, and despair know no geography and need no distinction. Unlike the rights of first nations people, which end at the reserve borders, suffering is indeed a portable issue. In my view, Kelowna provided false hope for grassroots people, people with real needs, while enriching organizations and the aboriginal elitist groups.

We trust you will agree that building real and sustainable hope for a generation requires more than partisan politics. We ask this, since, based on this evidence, it is clear that the Kelowna process was not about inclusion. It was not about recognition and accommodation. It was about considering hundreds of thousands of people, including me, who don't live on these small tracts of land called reserves, as less important than others who do.

We learned of the Kelowna commitments the same way members of the press did—through a news release issued at the conclusion of a news conference held at the closing of the first ministers meeting. We believe the current government has made its position on the Kelowna investments well known. Though they support the

objectives of the commitments, they see the need for a more concerted strategy and plan in respect of their resourcing and delivery to ensure that no one gets left behind.

We are asking the current government to move at this time and provide real, practical, tangible results to better the lives of aboriginal peoples.

● (0915)

In the meantime, our people await real hope and the relief that only real change can bring to improve the lives of aboriginal people. Specifically, it is our counsel to this committee that you determine with certainty how the proposed \$5.1 billion in funding would be disbursed across the provinces and territories, the extent to which the investments will be allocated on and off reserve, and what measures would be taken to ensure that national aboriginal organizations have the necessary capacity to assist in its delivery. Further, and perhaps even more fundamental, is the need to ensure that appropriate report card mechanisms are in place to ensure accountability, responsibility, and transparency in their use by the provinces, territories, and national aboriginal organizations.

Accountability is essential in our crusade to eradicate poverty. Public funds fuel this crusade. Canadians both need to and deserve to know whether we are making real progress or if changes to an approach are required in order to ensure success.

Over the past year, I have met with many of you, from all political stripes and across this land, in an effort to ensure that we share an understanding of the challenges our people face. Our aim has been, and remains, to engender debate, provoke sincere bipartisan discussion, and hopefully, through this, bring about meaningful and sustainable progress.

I hope this committee, in its study of this proposed bill, will send a message to aboriginal people from sea to sea to sea that Parliament speaks for all those in Canada who seek a share of its boundless prosperity, and that, similarly, this Parliament chooses hope, through inclusion and accommodation, over partisanship and politics on the backs of this country's most disadvantaged.

In closing, I'd like to offer for debate three potential solutions that I believe will make a real difference in the lives of aboriginal people. One, eliminate the Indian Act and replace with it with a nation recognition legislation—again, the concept of nation. Two, address the issue of jurisdiction and responsibility for Canada's aboriginal people. Three, introduce measures to ensure greater accountability, responsibility, and transparency by aboriginal organizations and band councils throughout this country to those they represent.

I invite your questions.

Thank you. *Merci . Meegwetch.*

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brazeau.

Madame Tobobondung.

Ms. Vera Pawis Tabobondung (President, National Association of Friendship Centres): I want to say good morning and *meegwetch* for the opportunity to be here and present to the standing committee.

I want to acknowledge the Creator for the day he has given us today. I want to acknowledge the peoples whose territory I am honoured to be in today, and most certainly I want to acknowledge all of you for your work, that what has become known as the Kelowna accord can be seen as the most significant aboriginal policy initiative since the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

From April 2004 to November 2005, an historic process was undertaken where the big five national aboriginal organizations were provided unprecedented access and opportunity to address the multi-faceted barriers facing first nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples in this country. The entire process culminated in a first ministers meeting on aboriginal issues, where 14 jurisdictions agreed to an action plan.

Despite all this, friendship centres demonstrated outside the meeting, but we did so with a heavy heart because friendship centres support the measures contained in their agreements. We felt they did not go far enough. The agreements failed to adequately deal with the 50% of first nations, Métis, and Inuit people who live in urban areas. The agreements would not provide the programming and resources necessary to meaningfully impact the issues our clients face every day.

Friendship centres background: this is an important distinction. Friendship centres, like the five national aboriginal organizations consulted and present during the first ministers meeting, are service delivery bodies. We do not claim to represent a certain segment of aboriginal people; we serve all of them: first nations, both status and non-status; Métis from all areas of Canada; and Inuit peoples. Friendship centres are in 116 communities across Canada—large, medium, and small communities. They are places of gathering and refuge for aboriginal women to take their rightful place in leadership and governance in our agencies and communities, for our young people to access programming and to become engaged and empowered; they are places to celebrate and practice our cultures.

Friendship centres are places to heal, places to find food when you're hungry, access to training when you need it, and start on the path toward a better life for you, your family, and your nation.

Last year, Friendship centres provided over 1.1 million client services across Canada. Friendship centres possess an impressive capacity to reach the often forgotten urban aboriginal population.

Friendship centre experience: we brought all this experience to the first Canada aboriginal peoples round table on April 19, 2004. There we witnessed from the outside the beginning of over 20 months of deliberations and planning. Despite being the largest aboriginal service to the infrastructure in Canada, we were afforded no opportunity to provide policy advice or insight into matters considered.

During the round tables, we were forced into a distinction-based conversation on how the Métis Nation should address lifelong learning, develop their housing stock, or define and demonstrate accountability. No space was provided in the dialogue for a broader urban aboriginal conversation on how to address education needs, what housing services are required, what level of jurisdiction is responsible for these areas, what is the role of representative bodies, what is the role of service providers. Indeed, a historic opportunity was lost.

Our first demonstration occurred during the May 31, 2005, policy retreat with the leaders of the five national aboriginal organizations and the aboriginal affairs committee. We wanted to highlight the important conversation that was being missed.

The Prime Minister met briefly with us to hear our concerns. He agreed that some role should exist for this conversation to occur and challenged his officials to find one. They failed.

Not only were we not afforded an opportunity to participate in the dialogue, we were not even able to submit reports for consideration. In the days and weeks before the first ministers meetings, the government assured us that Kelowna was just a start, that it was not perfect, that they would look at the specific urban issues in implementation and follow-up.

● (0920)

Still we decided to hold an information rally outside out of the first ministers meeting to remind everyone involved that the work is not done. It was incomplete.

We must come together and address urban issues in the implementation and beyond.

Despite all of this, the friendship centre movement still encourages the federal government to support the measures contained in the Kelowna accord. In part, this is because we recognize the benefits that would accrue to all aboriginal peoples by proceeding with a comprehensive plan, a process rather than a piecemeal approach.

We have also signed an MOU with the Assembly of First Nations that will ensure our involvement in future initiatives and discussions that follow on Kelowna.

It is important that we do not stop there. We must get to work on addressing the issues that our clients face.

If we are to effect meaningful change to the life conditions that first nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples face, we must develop some thinking on the urban dilemma. We must get past our jurisdictional divides. We must think bigger than our own organizations.

Bill C-292 is short. It seeks to get this government to commit to the terms of the Kelowna accord.

For us, this includes the text of the plans developed. It includes the approach of working with aboriginal groups on the issues facing our communities. It includes adding to this work to address the urban challenges facing first nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples.

It is no secret that Kelowna was not perfect. No process ever is.

Our recommendations: to believe and support it; to believe and support Kelowna; to believe that our work didn't end there; and to believe that we need "Kelowna plus".

Thank you very much.

● (0925)

The Chair: Thank you for that presentation.

I just want to advise the committee members that Sherry Lewis, the executive director of the Native Womens Association of Canada.... Somehow they got their wires crossed and she didn't realize she was supposed to be here. They are right now in the office trying to find somebody who might be able to come to this committee meeting. If not, we'll have to possibly reschedule or not have the opportunity to speak to them.

The other issue is that I'd like to leave fifteen minutes at the end of this meeting to discuss a couple of the motions that have been forwarded.

Is that fine with the members?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay, we will do that.

We will start our questions with the Liberals.

You would be first, Madam Neville.

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

I apologize to those who are here for being late. I was delayed in another meeting.

Mr. Brazeau, I wonder whether you would mind going over, for me, your three recommendations that you summarized at the end, please.

Chief Patrick Brazeau: Number one is to start talking about the elimination of the Indian Act. First nations people living on reserve have been under that system for 130 years now and it hasn't been working. I've been quite vocal in the last couple of weeks that there are too many chiefs and not enough Indians.

If you look at Canada as a whole, you have one prime minister who represents 33 million people. In the aboriginal world, you have 633 chiefs who represent approximately 275,000 people living on reserve.

We know the Indian Act has significant problems of governance and accountability. If we're going to eradicate poverty, eliminating the act is one step in the right direction. There are a lot of chiefs who are not supportive of this undertaking. On reserve is where they get their power, their control over the people. They get to spend money, public funds, on reserve, and they don't have to be held accountable to the people they represent. At least let's start having this debate. It would go a long way towards eradicating poverty.

My second recommendation concerns jurisdiction for aboriginal people, specifically those who live off reserve. We know that the federal government has jurisdiction over Indians living on reserve, and Inuit people as well. But when it comes to off-reserve aboriginal and Métis people, it's a toss-up between the federal and provincial governments. People fall between the cracks because nobody assumes responsibility for them. So there's also a debate needed with respect to clarifying jurisdiction for off-reserve aboriginal people, who are the majority of the aboriginal population in this country.

My third recommendation is to bring about more governance, accountability, and transparency measures within the current reserve

communities. Let's face it, approximately half of the reserve communities across this country still deny off-reserve members the right to vote in band elections. This is despite a 1999 Supreme Court ruling in the Corbiere decision, which allowed for off-reserve voting. Approximately one-third of reserve communities are either in third-party management or other financial difficulties.

I think the debate is needed. We can talk about Kelowna all we want, but debate is needed to tackle the real problems in this country and face them head on. If we're going to make significant changes and improve the lives of people, we have to get to those problems, and not throw more money into a system that's not working anyway.

Those are my three recommendations.

● (0930)

Hon. Anita Neville: You talk about the elimination of the Indian Act as a means of eliminating or alleviating poverty. Certainly Kelowna was intended to close the gap for aboriginal people across this country, whether it's in education, health, or economic independence. I don't have to go through it. Could you be more specific about how the elimination of the Indian Act would alleviate poverty?

Chief Patrick Brazeau: That's a good question and the answer is very simple. If I take the example of the Algonquin people, of whom I'm a part, across Ontario and Quebec there are nine Algonquin reserve communities. Eliminating the Indian Act would offer the opportunity for those nine communities to amalgamate and form the true historical Algonquin nation. They would be able to create their own constitution, decide on their citizenship, and develop their own accountability and transparency measures. It would be a method for reunification.

Let's face it, the Indian Act divides people, gives different labels to people. Without it, we would be able to get together and form our true historical first nation. We'd be able to discuss revenue-sharing and developing our own economic base on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people, as opposed to Crown lands. We would be able to partner with different levels of government and private enterprises so that we could move towards own-source revenue and stop the dependence on the federal government for funding.

That just makes sense. We cannot, as aboriginal people, depend for the rest of eternity on federal funds and taxpayers' dollars to run small administrations on reserves. We have to think big and move in that direction to benefit people.

We always hear chiefs saying we have to get rid of the Indian Act, but actually, they hide behind it. That's where they get their employment, their control over the people, and that's how they turn around and ensure that the people below them in the communities stay below them. They become an elitist group. We have to move away from that.

Hon. Anita Neville: Do I have more time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Just a minute and a half.

Hon. Anita Neville: Not enough.

You have very strong views and that's apparent. We've met before, and you know there is much discussion as to who you represent. When you put these views forward, I ask you, on what basis do you do it? Is it based on consultation with community groups? Is it a small working group that you have? How do you do that, and how do you come to your views?

You speak frequently of representing most aboriginal peoples, south of 60 certainly. From where do you get your authority to do that?

Chief Patrick Brazeau: Basically, we are made up of provincial organizations from coast to coast. They have annual assemblies where people can get together and discuss and pass resolutions, similar to other political parties.

It's basically a method of consultation. I attend those provincial assemblies when they occur from coast to coast. It gives us an opportunity to speak with the people. Resolutions are passed, and we act upon those resolutions.

With respect to representation, we have always said that we advocate on behalf of the rights and interests of people, because even though our provincial organizations have membership lists, people, regardless of whether they are members of an organization, for example, or not, when they enter the building of one of our provincial affiliates, if they are in need and the services are available, they get serviced. That's very well documented.

So we make no distinction with respect to direct representation. Our provincial affiliates provide programs and services to people regardless of whether they are members of the organizations or not, because as aboriginal peoples, we cannot require people to become members, just as we cannot require mainstream Canadians to become members of any political party if they don't wish to do so.

• (0935)

Hon. Anita Neville: As just a quick question, how do you get your authority to speak for the reorganization of what you are proposing to happen in first nations communities on reserve? From where do you get that base of authority and support and consultation? I don't understand that.

Chief Patrick Brazeau: I'm not sure it's a question of authority. I think it's a question of common sense.

I'm a status Indian. I'm from a reserve. Of course, I live off reserve. This is just a means of providing solutions, because in my young life and young career, I haven't heard many solutions in the past ten years. I hear a lot of rhetoric. I hear a lot of people—leaders—calling for more money, calling for more funding, because that's going to solve the problems, but money is not going to solve the problems. It's leadership that will solve the problems, and it's solutions and debating those solutions that will make things happen.

So as to my authority, first of all, I'm elected, as you are, and that's the basis upon which I act.

The Chair: I have to cut it off here and move on to Mr. Lemay—

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

The Chair: —but I think that's the keyword. You were duly elected. We are duly elected. That's how we get our authority.

Mr. Lemay.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: I was listening to the translation; it was very interesting.

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Excuse me, but I don't have translation.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: How come you don't have the translation, Jean?

[English]

This is your French course this morning.

[Translation]

Mme Jean Crowder: I speak French, but it is very important that I understand everything.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I know how important my comments are.

Mr. Chair, I hope this interruption does not cut into my speaking time.

[English]

The Chair: Just a few minutes ago, somehow, somebody switched something, because they were on the one channel and now they've moved to another.

Would somebody check on that, please?

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: I will start anew.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Lemay.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: First of all, I thank you for being here this morning. My questions will more likely be for Mr. Brazeau.

I come from the Abitibi—Témiscamingue riding, and my colleague Yvon is from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou. We therefore know how important native friendship centres are. We should in no way call them into question. If ever you have problems getting help, let us know.

Mr. Brazeau, I have a very specific question to ask you. If tomorrow the model government opposite, which recognizes the Quebec nation, recognized off reserve Aboriginals and abolished, at your request, the Indian Act, would that, in your opinion, abolish reserves?

• (0940)

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: On the one hand, that would not abolish reserves, because people would continue to live in their current communities. On the other, they would form a nation that would include the territorial lands of the nation in question.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I would like to point out a problem to you, Mr. Brazeau. I do not want to interrupt you, but you should read the Canadian Constitution and, more specifically, section 91 of the Indian Act. It is clearly stated that if you abolish the Indian Act, you also abolish reserves, in principle; there would no longer be any. I am a lawyer and have pleaded cases up to the Court of Appeal. I know that there would no longer be any reserves.

Two rulings by the Supreme Court have just confirmed this, regarding aboriginal women's real property rights. That was in 1986. Since that time, aboriginal women have fought for real property rights... And the model government, which recognizes the Quebec nation, has recently struck a committee to study those rights. Clearly, if we abolish the Indian Act, there will no longer be any reserves.

We can talk about the Algonquin Anishinabeg, who are right in the heart of my region, Abitibi. Why would they not create a grand council of the Anishinabeg nation, as the Attikamek grand council has just done, in order to pool their claims? Why not? Because you assume that the Indian Act has to be eliminated?

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: Absolutely. This is nothing new. In fact, it was recommended by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 10 years ago. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, the UN special rapporteur on the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples, has said that the right to self-government cannot be applied to the current reserve system; it applies to a nation. The Indian Act therefore needs to be abolished.

Abolishing the reserve system would, ultimately, be beneficial because young people on reserves have no hope. They do not have access to education, and there is no housing. Will the government invest more money in a dysfunctional system?

Mr. Marc Lemay: I wanted to hear you on that because it is far removed from Kelowna, although somewhat related. I agree with you to say that there will have to be such a debate, but aboriginal communities will first have to discuss this amongst themselves. All the chiefs that I have met, whether legitimate or not, told me that they wanted to keep the reserve system. We cannot act against their will. So what do we do?

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: The solution is very simple: you go over the heads of chiefs and consult the people in the communities. I said that many chiefs in this country exert control over their people. I do not have proof of this. There are things I will keep silent today, but that will come out eventually.

That being said, it is the people who have to be consulted. And I will not hide my intentions. In 2001, we worked with the liberal government on the Governance Bill. We supported that bill because it would have led to changes in the communities, making chiefs more representative of the people they represent.

Mr. Marc Lemay: But that was provided for in Kelowna. Money was set aside to ensure the responsibility of band councils.

I have another problem for you; this will be the last of four. You spoke of eliminating the Indian Act; we know your position. You speak of establishing their jurisdiction. Who is responsible for whom? The answer is clearer in Quebec, in the Quebec nation. I do not know if that is the case elsewhere in Canada, but in Quebec, aboriginals living on reserves are under provincial jurisdiction. That

is clear, the Appeal's Court has ruled in that sense. Here, you are right, because when aboriginals fall under Quebec jurisdiction, for example, for health care, less money goes into the reserves. I agree with that.

• (0945)

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: I have to point out that there is currently a case before the courts, the Daniels case. It is possible that the resolution will shed light on the issue of responsibility. In our opinion, the federal government is responsible for all Canadian aboriginals.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Off reserve?

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: All aboriginals in Quebec.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Included off-reserve aboriginals?

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: Exactly.

Mr. Marc Lemay: When will that case be heard, and before what court?

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: It is currently at the Federal Court.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Has there been a submission, a ruling?

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: Not yet, it is still in the preliminary stages.

Mr. Marc Lemay: And does it concern health?

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: The case deals with the federal government's responsibility towards all aboriginals. Therefore, the responsibility of provinces towards aboriginals living off reserve is not clearly defined at the moment.

Mr. Marc Lemay: The fiscal imbalance will soon be settled.

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: Exactly, but in that regard, the Prime Minister sent us a letter in January indicating that he wanted to work on legislative measures to transfer funds to the provinces in order to assist aboriginals living off reserve.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Could you table that letter? Is it possible to have a copy?

[English]

The Chair: Madam Crowder is next.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Yes, but I would like to obtain that letter, Mr. Chair. Perhaps the parliamentary secretary could table it.

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: It is on my website.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, Madam Crowder.

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

I want to thank the witnesses for coming before the committee today.

I think it's a little troubling that we're actually not dealing with Kelowna. Since we seem to have deviated, I'm going to continue to deviate. I'm actually going to go back to the Kelowna agreement—or accord. It seems to have a number of names.

In the Kelowna accord, the preamble in the introduction did talk about:

The Aboriginal peoples of Canada includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada. This is inclusive of all Aboriginal peoples, who may reside on reserves or settlements, in rural or urban areas, or northern and Arctic regions.

In my own province of British Columbia, there was then an agreement signed, which was the transformative change accord. It also talked about the fact that:

The parties understand that new resources will be required to close the gaps and federal and provincial investments on and off reserve will be made available pursuant to the decisions taken at the November 2005 First Ministers' Meeting.

It seems to me that we are presuming how money would unroll in the absence of any information. We're presuming that offers would not have been considered.

I want to come back to Ms. Tabobondung and to Mr. Brazeau. I have a question that I want to frame in the context of something that came from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. In recommendation 2.3.2 it says that "All governments in Canada recognize that Aboriginal peoples are nations vested with the right of self-determination." Then they go on to talk about how aboriginal peoples identify themselves as nations. It seems to me this is the crux of the question that you are both raising. It says:

Aboriginal peoples are entitled to identify their own national units for purposes of exercising the right of self-determination. For an Aboriginal nation to exercise the right of self-determination, it does not have to be recognized as a nation by the federal government or by provincial governments. Nevertheless, unless other Canadian governments are prepared to acknowledge the existence of Aboriginal nations and to negotiate with them, such nations may find it difficult to exercise their rights effectively....

They then go on to say that:

The federal government put in place a neutral and transparent process for identifying Aboriginal groups entitled to exercise the right of self-determination as nations, a process that uses the following specific attributes.

I won't continue to read it. There were a lot of criteria set out, and this was an extensive consultation process.

I'm uncomfortable, in the absence of other representation.

Mr. Brazeau, you have specifically talked about abolishing the Indian Act, and I think part of the problem we have as a country, Canada, and Quebec, is that people behind closed doors in committees like this have made unilateral decisions that have excluded first nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples from the decision-making at the table.

You talked about the fact that there were distinction-based conversations that, it seemed to me, excluded groups of people. In effect, because this work wasn't done from 1996, I don't know how you address this distinction-based conversation in the absence of all this other work that should have been done.

Could you both talk to that specifically? I would really appreciate it if it was focused on solutions rather than talking about the alleged deeds of other groups of people. I don't think that's helpful in this context.

• (0950)

Ms. Vera Pawis Tabobondung: I believe, as a friendship centre movement, that we provide the opportunity for people to come together, that we do understand that we do have a relationship, for example, with the Anishinabek Nation. They very clearly have a number of friendship centres in their territory. They too are

beginning to understand that we are part of the solution, and they have afforded us the opportunity to be at least an observer in some of the tables. Clearly, in other areas we also have that relationship with the first nations communities, or that community, to come together and to be part of that whole nation-building process.

It's a process, and it's relatively new to some of us and to some of the clients who are part of the friendship centre movement. But this is not to say that they don't want to be included.

How would it look for us as a friendship centre movement if we had nation houses or changed how we look? That, in itself, would have to mean a discussion amongst the friendship centre people to say, "What would that look like?", "How could we interact?", "How could we improve?", and "How could we ensure that the people on the ground were the ones who were engaged for those kinds of discussions?" Because most certainly the solutions would be to their benefit.

Mr. Peter Dinsdale (Executive Director, National Association of Friendship Centres): Our concerns with the Kelowna accord and the distinction-based approach you talk about are nuanced, because we certainly support the measures they contain.

I'm a status Indian. Throughout the friendship centre movement, many of the people we serve are status Indians, and we want our communities to do well. That means, as an example of education—you asked for examples—the discussion in Kelowna talked about the need for first nations school boards, increased teacher training, and Métis bursaries, all very worthy and needed measures, and those are measures the friendship centre movement didn't disagree with.

The challenge for us is that our approach as a service delivery provider in urban areas would have focused on how a single aboriginal woman in downtown Winnipeg accesses schooling for her and her child. What supports are there for her? What housing programs are available? What level of jurisdiction is responsible? What is the role of all the various players involved?

That for us was the challenge. We supported a distinction-based approach for nation building, and the friendship centre movement hasn't taken any position on nation approaches. I don't think the infrastructure is ready off reserve for that, frankly, and it would be a process that would need time. We're one of the few major urban aboriginal programs that has any longevity in Canada. The infrastructure just doesn't exist.

Our view would be to support and develop the building of the communities we're from. Nation concepts exist. There are regional bodies currently involved that do that kind of conglomeration. The distinction-based approach needs to happen, but we need to make sure the unique needs, and not the rights, are being addressed. We talk a lot about the right to education, the right to housing. We didn't talk about the needs of people in the communities we serve, so that was the challenge for us.

The Chair: We're out of time, so unfortunately, Mr. Brazeau, you cannot answer.

Mr. Blaney.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning and welcome to our committee.

Ms. Tobobondung, I would like to thank you for being here. You represent a major association. Of course, my colleague Marc Lemay alluded to statements made yesterday recognizing that Quebecers form a nation. Aboriginals form several nations and are often cited as an example. And yet, we all live together here, in Canada.

The Erasmus-Dussault report was published 10 years ago. My first question is the following: Do you find that the progress made over the past 10 years has met your expectations? Do you believe there are major challenges that have not been addressed? I think you spoke about some of them, but I would like to know what your major priorities are. What are the two or three problems that you would like our government to solve in the short term?

You have already mentioned that we have committed funds, but clearly this is not only about money. Mr. Brazeau spoke about a change of approach. I would first like to hear your comments. What are the three measures that could be taken immediately, over the next year? We know that our department has proposed to reform on-reserve matrimonial rights. In your opinion, what lasting solutions could truly bring about sustainable changes to first nations?

• (0955)

Mr. Patrick Brazeau: First of all, my presentation contained three recommendations that speak for themselves. Of course, the Indian Act is becoming a priority, because there are currently too many chiefs in Canada. If we undertook to group our true nations, I believe that we would be giving hope to Aboriginals and our young people, which is very important. Young people make up almost 50 % of Canada's aboriginal population. So we have to stop the talk and start to walk.

If we abolished the Indian Act and, instead of having 633 chiefs across the country, grouped Aboriginals by their true nations, we would have between 60 and 80 true chiefs representing their respective nations. With regard to land claims, if an entire nation makes a claim, that nation speaks on behalf of all its people. At present, a given nation is made up of various reserves, which have claims on the same tracts of land, making for overlapping claims. If there were a true nation, that would simplify negotiations for the government, the community or the aboriginal nation. I think that this is a priority in Canada; people have long been asking that the Indian Act be abolished.

You are absolutely right, it is not a matter of investing more money in a government-managed system. We need our own system, but we have to adopt measures and be in a position to begin this discussion.

Concerning governance, as I indicated earlier, we worked with the federal government in 2001, on the first nations governance bill. We were the only national aboriginal organization to support the bill, because its goal was to make changes for people living on reserves. That is the heart of the matter: we have to think about the people, not only the elected representatives and chiefs. We have to think about the people who are truly disadvantaged, who really have no hope.

We have to give hope to those people. That is our common task. That is my duty as a national leader. We need to increase transparency, governance and responsibility in our aboriginal community to deal with the problems out there. I am aware that there are also problems in non aboriginal communities, but we have to look in our collective mirror and act accordingly. We have to be more accountable to the people we represent, and that is what we are currently doing.

My third point is that we need to address the responsibility issue. As I mentioned earlier, the federal government is responsible, under the Constitution, for Aboriginals living on reserves, as well as the Inuit. The responsibility for the majority of Aboriginals, those living off reserves, has yet to be defined. We therefore have to adopt a definition, make clarifications and determine who is responsible for Aboriginals living off reserves. They account for the majority of the population.

I would like to come back to the famous Kelowna accord: 90 % of the funding was to go to people on reserves. People on reserves are a major consideration. I believe the intention was good, but if we want to fight poverty, we have to consider the entire population, not only a minority, because the statistics ultimately, will not change. So, with regard to the Kelowna accord, after 18 months of consultations, I think we all agree on the fact that we have to reduce the poverty level of Canadian Aboriginals. However, we won't get far if we only give funding and hope to a minority of people, and we will not have done our work as we are supposed to.

• (1000)

Mr. Steven Blaney: Thank you.

May I hear a bit from Ms. Tobobondung?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Blaney, we are out of time.

Mr. Steven Blaney: We're out of time.

Well, thank you. I wish we had more—

The Chair: I'm going to turn it over to the Liberals. Who will speak on behalf of the Liberals?

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): Having grown up around friendship centres my entire life, I know the valuable service they provide. I know that the Kelowna accord would have provided some direct investment. Would there have been an opportunity to leverage other funding to realize an economy of scale? Could we have pulled money in from different Health Canada or provincial health funding initiatives, different child care initiatives, which are maybe not directly mentioned in Kelowna, but which may exist in other pots of funding?

It seems to me that the potential for this was great under the Kelowna accord. I know the realities of the friendship centres struggling from month to month sometimes, trying to make sure the funding was there. Could you speak about that potential?

Ms. Vera Pawis Tabobondung: That is the success of friendship centres. For every dollar, we're able to leverage seven more dollars from different areas. We know we could do better. We could share that with the other leaders and with government to start to build the business case for centres of excellence based on our experiences thus far.

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: We tried to hold an information rally instead of a demonstration. We had assurances from the Prime Minister in May that there would be accommodation made for service delivery. It didn't occur. We had assurances from the Minister of Indian Affairs and some other ministers at the 11th hour that the accommodation would occur in the implementation. This included an urban focus in the fall, which didn't occur afterward. So there were some accommodations and approaches. That's why in all our communication—which made us less sexy on television—we said we supported Kelowna, but that it was just a beginning.

In Bill C-292, the second clause talks about directing the government to implement Kelowna in its intent. For us the intent is the collaborative approach. It is the investments, the strategic and historic investments, that were to have been made as a beginning. We would then turn our attention to the areas we weren't able to get to. As for the notion that we'd have a distinction-based conversation with this urban lens crossing all the themes, it didn't occur. The lens was a blindfold.

They recognized that there needed to be more work done, and we are going to do that work. That's why we stand here today saying we support Kelowna. It's a beginning, not an end. It's "Kelowna plus". It's a Kelowna to build on, for the majority of people who live in urban areas and work with federal officials, partners, and other NAOs. It's so people on the ground will have an opportunity to access the program.

Mr. Gary Merasty: In my area, there is good cooperation between the first nations communities, the reserves, and the friendship centres. There was that economy of scale, that cooperation, the renting of offices, the providing of services to urban people. It had positive impacts in Saskatchewan and was even more effective in the north.

What state are you in right now? I've had a few calls from executive directors back home. How secure are the friendship centres in their ability to provide these key services and ensure those partnerships with the first nations and Métis communities?

• (1005)

Ms. Vera Pawis Tabobondung: We're talking with Minister Oda about what friendship centres would look like in the future, about the kinds of enhancements they need today to catch up and to continue this work in 2007 and beyond. It's not only about the core operations of the centres. We also need to consider the spin-offs. We're doing this work with all the other levels of government, presenting our business case and advancing our centres of excellence approach to improving the lives of aboriginal people in an urban environment.

The Chair: Thank you.

On the government side, Mr. Albrecht, please.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to each of you for appearing before us today.

My remarks will be directed primarily to Ms. Tabobondung and Mr. Dinsdale.

You mentioned in your presentation that your first demonstration was in May 2005 and you weren't heard at that time. You said you weren't even able to submit reports. You went on to say you support the measures in the Kelowna accord, and I think our government has been clear that we do as well, as it relates to closing the gaps and addressing the needs of aboriginal people. Twice I've heard the term "Kelowna plus".

I don't question for a minute anyone's commitment to improving the lives and the lot of aboriginal people. I want you to know I requested to serve on this committee out of the same desire, not because of any expertise, but because of a desire to move ahead.

But it seems to me, in the last six to nine months of Parliament, we have wasted an inordinate amount of time talking about a word, "Kelowna", and another word, "accord". We've wasted committee time and we've wasted Parliament's time, and, more importantly, I believe we've wasted a lot of aboriginal peoples' time, especially the institutions that represent those people.

It is clear that our government has taken a number of concrete steps to address many of the needs of both on-reserve and off-reserve aboriginal people: large financial investments addressing housing, education, and water needs. Also, we've tried to begin to address some of the structural issues. The present collaborative approach in addressing matrimonial real property is one indicator of the kind of collaborative process we'd like to move ahead on.

My question is this. With the evidence of the financial investment this government has committed, in addition to addressing some of the structural needs, don't you think we are really wasting a lot of time talking about a concept from a year ago, instead of moving ahead and really getting down to work to address the needs of all Canadians collaboratively and cooperatively? That question is for both of you.

Ms. Vera Pawis Tabobondung: You can understand that as I am the president of the National Association of Friendship Centres, it is very valuable time. Without looking behind and knowing where I come from, how am I going to be sure where I'm going?

For sure, I can whine and complain about what I didn't like, but most certainly we're talking about what we can support. We're prepared to do the work. You and I can sit at the table and know the time we have and know we all have the same 24 hours, but we believe in our commitment, in our ability to change our attitude and move things forward, accepting the mistakes and the strengths of the past.

We were reminded the other night that we didn't get all the things the people advised from our communities from all parts of the country in terms of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. That's all of our fault. It is not just any one individual. We all wear that shame. We all wear that cloak. It's like trying to remove that, trying to remove the cloak of colonialism, to develop a respect for each other as leaders, as a people, so we are all proud to be Canadians. As aboriginals, we don't expect anything less, and we most certainly know if we don't start to hit this poverty thing running on the ground, then most certainly we'll have nothing to be shiny and glistening and proud about. That's not the message that comes from the friendship centre people or the people in our communities.

I could go on, because you could answer the question as a leader, or at least I could, as a mother, a grandmother, and an auntie, but most certainly I think there's lots of work to do.

• (1010)

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: We were summoned to talk about Kelowna and Bill C-292, which is why our remarks are directed as such.

I would love to have an opportunity to present to this committee on what specific urban aboriginal action plans are required to effect meaningful change for people in communities, but that's not what this is about and that is why our remarks are not about it.

You mention your concrete steps. I don't think there is any question that the residential school announcement, the MRP consultations, the water investments, and education are all vitally important, but let's recognize that they are primarily on reserve. The \$300 million housing trust will not affect things off reserve. With respect, we still haven't been involved in any conversations about how we're addressing that other half, so we're still calling for that approach. We'd love an opportunity to have those conversations about the concrete steps in urban communities.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I think that just identifies the point I was trying to make, if we were to put that aside for a minute and talk about what concrete steps are needed for us to move ahead, not just for your group but for all aboriginal groups.

Thank you.

The Chair: A point well taken.

Mr. Lévesque.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair, Ms. Tobobondung and Mr. Brazeau.

Mr. Dinsdale does not need the interpretation. I believe he has learned to speak French.

I am very familiar with aboriginal friendship centres, as well as the first nations. However, Mr. Brazeau, can you please clarify a part of your testimony. If the Inuit are to be considered as a nation, are they to be included with the first nations, or with aboriginal peoples? Which of these two groups would suit the Inuit better, for the sake of discussion?

I will ask all my questions because we sometimes do not have enough time to ask supplementary questions.

In your proposal, Mr. Brazeau, you suggest that we abolish the Indian Act, but that it be immediately replaced by legislation that may be even more restrictive than the current act, because the new one would take away from various communities the right to elect their own leader.

I, for one, believe that a nation can have several leaders but leaders who get together to choose one representative for the nation. This is, by far, the highly desirable solution. In Quebec, the Cree form a nation and they have established the Grand Council of the Crees that is represented by a powerful leader. It has been proven that by showing just as much confidence in the first nations as we have in the Inuit, much progress can be achieved more quickly, and we would have to rely less on immigrants to improve Canada's productivity.

Quebec has proven this by acknowledging the first nations as a full-fledged nation, with no conditions attached, in spite of the Canadian or Quebec Constitution. We want all aboriginal nations in Canada and in Quebec to enjoy this status, so long as we remain in Canada. Currently, education and health care, among others, fall under provincial jurisdiction. You're saying that you want to bring the nations together, but abolishing the Indian Act would mean that reserves would disappear off the map. You need land territories. Negotiations to define the land on which a nation is to reside must start. This is a bold vision, and I have difficulty seeing how you will convince someone else to undertake this unification. I believe it is up to your nation as a unified group, to make suggestions to us. I will let you comment on that.

I would like to ask Ms. Tobobondung to explain to us what can be done, because to my mind, it is important to be able to address all of the nations you represent. Can we use one single definition, either that of the first nations or of Aboriginals? I do not know which of these two groups would also include the Inuit.

• (1015)

[*English*]

Ms. Vera Pawis Tabobondung: Thank you very much for your question.

In our language, as a people, we acknowledge each other with our names. Whether we're Anishinabek, whether we're the Haudenosaunee, whether we're the Inuit, we all have names for each other by which we recognize each other, and we need to maintain that. We need to continue that. There is no way Vera Pawis Tabobondung is the same as anyone else, because that is my name. I have role responsibility for that name, the same as Haudenosaunee people have a role responsibility. Anishinabek people and Haida people, they all have their own name, their own identity. So very clearly, that's how it will be.

When you come to a friendship centre, we don't necessarily ask who you are. You choose to come there, and you will tell me how you want to be recognized.

[Translation]

Chief Patrick Brazeau: With respect to your comment on the Indian Act, it must be pointed out that the Grand Council of the Crees is not subject to the Indian Act, which is a good thing. This is the direction we must take. True first nations must be formed. It is not necessarily true that territory borders must be negotiated, because the territories already exist. If we look at the current reserve system, there are communities already living on a specific territory. It is not a matter of moving a community in order to form another to create a true first nation. It is a matter of remaining where they are and negotiating agreements as a full-fledged nation, of building partnerships so that they can begin laying the foundation for economic development, thereby reducing dependence on the federal government and beginning to ensure our own funding.

This is not a matter of eliminating the reserve system, this is a matter of abolishing the Indian Act and thereby eliminating various communities and their leaders. The people must come together within a true nation so that it can draft its own constitution according to its own customs and history. It is a matter of creating a governance system to determine how the population will choose or elect its leaders, establish accountability criteria to be met by its representatives, and get into a debate. This is an important matter. Currently, this system and status quo simply do not work. Debate must be engaged. The solution that I am proposing is perhaps not the only one, but at least the debate must be engaged. The leaders cannot all be right, and the system is no longer working.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to turn to Mr. Bruinooge, please.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): National Chief Brazeau, did you bring a copy of the Kelowna accord with you today?

• (1020)

Chief Patrick Brazeau: I have the press release of the accord.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: I'm interested to hear about this press release, because so often I've been told at this committee that there is in fact an accord, and it's nice to hear that at least someone is talking about the truth, in the sense that "accord" did not exist. There was no signature page.

Having said that, the Government of Canada does want to move forward on behalf of aboriginal Canadians.

Perhaps you could talk to me a bit about the approach that you talked about, which is system change. That's one of the biggest issues I've had with the discussions that occurred at the first ministers meeting of last year. In fact, there were no ideas presented about system change, about improving the structure for which benefits are delivered to aboriginal people.

This is something that you've been a large advocate for. So perhaps you could tell us about how you attempted to bring that to the debate. Were the parties that set up this first ministers meeting at all interested in your ideas?

Chief Patrick Brazeau: I will just bring up a couple of points of clarification.

I think it's important to note, because I haven't heard it here today, that Budget 2006 does indicate that this current government is supportive of the discussions and commitments that occurred in Kelowna. Let's not lose track of that. That's very important. It is in Budget 2006.

The big question is not the set of guiding principles we discussed in Kelowna. I think nobody disagrees with that, regardless of political stripe. The big issue is the \$5.1 billion. Is that going to go a long way in eradicating poverty? There are 1.4 million aboriginal peoples in this country. Over a five-year period, \$5.1 billion divided by 1.4 million people is not going to eradicate poverty. I'm not a mathematician, but that's not a whole lot of money to eradicate poverty.

What this Kelowna process did.... I'll go back to the Constitution. Section 35 defines the aboriginal peoples of Canada as being the Indian, Inuit, and Métis. It doesn't say in that same Constitution that those peoples will be represented by—I won't name them—other organizations. That's important to me, because I'm the leader of one organization that advocates on behalf of the rights and interests of aboriginal peoples.

To make a long story short, we are getting shafted in terms of the funding commitments that came out of Kelowna. That's what we have a problem with. That's where the discussion should be. It's not the principles. It's not a question of an accord. There are principles. Yes, the language is beautiful, it includes everybody, but at the end of the day, this was just going to benefit a minority of aboriginal peoples. It wasn't going to go very far in doing what it was intended to do.

Having said that, earlier, Mr. Albrecht asked what we can do in the meantime; we've wasted a year. Yes, we've wasted a year, but we haven't been wasting here. We're coming up with solutions, we're putting them on the table, and we're trying to raise the level of debate. It is angering a lot of people, but we are also getting a lot of support across this country for some of those ideas.

As I mentioned earlier, maybe eliminating the Indian Act is not the solution. Tell me what's better. Is the status quo going to work? Is it working for the people? A lot of people across this country, aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike, are putting a lot of faith in and giving a lot of implicit power to these chiefs. Yes, they are elected, but what are they doing for the people? I should mention that there are a lot of good chiefs across this country, but there are a lot of bad ones too. That's what we're trying to fix. Those are the real problems in the aboriginal world in this country.

I don't care what political stripe we are, we all have a responsibility to provide hope for the people living in those communities, whether they're on reserve or off reserve. That is our job. Having these partisan debates over a set of guiding principles is wasting people's time. Is this the hope we're trying to provide for people? The aboriginal issue has become a partisan issue within political parties. That, to me, is nonsense. We are wasting people's time.

With the aboriginal issue, we have to target the real problems. That's accountability, transparency, representation, and legitimacy of those peoples. Our nations existed before European contact. Now you have chiefs across this country saying let's not eliminate the Indian Act because the system is working pretty well for me.

That's what we have to fix in this country. Those are the real problems.

The Chair: Madam Crowder, please.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I am not even sure where to start. I think it's unfortunate that we end up with an either/or conversation. We have the Kelowna accord. With respect to my colleagues across the table, I think we've beaten this one to death. We've talked about an acknowledgment, an extensive process, that led to this understanding in Kelowna. There's grave concern across this country—first nations, Métis, Inuit people, on reserve, off reserve—that there are some serious systemic problems. We see it in report after report. If we had just moved ahead with the Kelowna accord as presented, and honoured the process, the extensive consultation, the people's involvement, we wouldn't be having this conversation. We would be focusing on off-reserve urban peoples, instead of having this divisive conversation about on reserve and off reserve. It's unfortunate, because we're not moving forward.

I want to come back to the friendship centres. You have a mandate, a structure that's clearly identifiable, delivery mechanisms. It's troubling that I'm hearing from some friendship centres that they're having a hard time keeping their doors open because they are reliant on so many sources of funding. Take the SCPI funding. I know Tillicum House in my riding is offering homeless youth a place, and their funding is going to run out.

Could you comment on the variety of sources of funding and whether some sources are in danger?

•(1025)

Ms. Vera Pawis Tabobondung: I had the opportunity as an observer to watch honourable men, honourable leadership, compromise, talk to each other, and agree on something that would walk us forward as aboriginal people and the Government of Canada. I was able to witness that, and I am thankful for it. I know that other people have made great sacrifices for me to be able to sit here. If I have to spend the rest of my life sacrificing for what I have seen, observed, and understood, then that will be my work.

Peter, do you have anything further on Jean's question?

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: Thank you. For every dollar the friendship centre receives from the federal government for our core funding program, we've leveraged seven additional dollars for other areas of programming. This year, we have about \$114 million in revenue spent through the friendship centre program. About a third of that comes from federal government sources, primarily health and employment and training. About another third comes from provincial sources, and it's really varied depending on the region and how active that region is. About another third is other municipal, like the healing foundation, other foundations, things of that nature.

The friendship centres across the country are in many ways similar to other non-profits in that we have an increasing reliance on contract staff because of Treasury Board guidelines around contribution

agreements and the Financial Administration Act. That really is an over-reliance for us, and it creates new funding paradigms for all these communities.

You mentioned the SCPI program, the national supporting community partnership initiatives through the National Homelessness Secretariat. Friendship centres across the country have open shelters and delivery agencies, and they're all threatening to close down with the funding cycle, like many others across the country. Tillicum House called me yesterday about their CAPC program and the issues they're having with the administration of that program. There is a lack of leadership on any level to be responsible for program delivery in urban areas.

There is a real void in that area. There is a very piecemeal approach. Friendship centres struggle every day to write their proposals and jump through the hoops. We're professional hoop dancers to get funding into the program to people where they need it on the ground.

We recently engaged in a process with this government, with our minister, and she's been very receptive and very open and very accommodating in talking about these challenges to the friendship centres. We haven't had an increase in core funding—and this is our sob story, and I know everyone has it—since we had an expenditure review cutback in 1995, a 40% reduction in real-term spending in local community centres. They bill you for Tillicum House to hire an executive director, to have a bookkeeper, to keep their place open to serve the expanding issues of homelessness and a growing aboriginal population.

I don't think anyone at this table disagrees with that. Our other national aboriginal organizations are under similar pressures from their programs, but it's a real, on the ground, where the rubber hits the road kind of issue. People come to our agencies. They're hungry. They need their bellies to be full. They're looking for a place to sleep at night. We're talking about poverty. This isn't a distinction-based conversation. This isn't a rights-based agenda. This is about the needs of people in communities: education, housing, and health care.

We have engaged, and this government has been very accommodating in engaging us, in that conversation. We're hopeful some of these long-term issues will begin to be addressed. So I think there has been action. It hasn't been sitting for a year doing nothing. We're all making our plans and trying to be active where we can.

•(1030)

The Chair: Thank you. You're out of time.

The chair is going to take the opportunity to ask a question. A few nights ago I attended the report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, and it was interesting because some of those issues about structural change were included in that report, and for the most part your report was an F for fail. Now we have this bill coming forward and referring to those discussions and priorities and the programs and the funding set out in the discussions of the first ministers and aboriginal leadership. Even so, some were excluded.

What I see in what was done in Kelowna is that they addressed it as they had prior to the RCAP, which is programs—throw money at it, but no structural change in the way we do things, given that empowerment and making that framework, so aboriginal people in this country can take on their own challenges and set their course, set their priorities.

I would just ask, Mr. Brazeau, how you feel about the comparison between the RCAP and the priorities and recommendations from Kelowna.

Chief Patrick Brazeau: Thank you for your question.

I'll just share this in passing. I was speaking with a former Liberal Indian affairs minister last week, and this person said that if Kelowna were implemented, it would set back the aboriginal agenda ten years, because it is an attempt to throw more money at the system, as I said earlier, which is failing anyway.

Ten years ago, RCAP came out, and at that time national organizations, regional organizations, communities, and people all across this land were consulted. There was obviously a consensus that led to the recommendations that came out of the report.

On that report, ten years later, I will say this in passing as well. I find it ironic that some other organizations are talking about RCAP when in fact in the last five years they never mentioned anything about RCAP. More importantly, even during the Kelowna process, RCAP was never used. In fact, it was our organization that has been mentioning RCAP for the last five or six years.

Other organizations have become educators or teachers, and they're now marking the progress we've made. People in other organizations haven't been consulted. It's true that the RCAP report itself has been collecting a lot of dust, but the solutions are all in that report. It's not rocket science. It's time to pick a few that will entail some structural changes, to ensure that it is going to provide opportunities for real people with real needs, and not just for a segment or an elitist group. That's our collective effort.

The nation-building one, the elimination of the Indian Act, is in that report. It's black and white. The special rapporteur on human rights indicated that reserve communities are not the modern manifestation of self-government because they are too small. There is not enough representation. The governance structures are weak. And that is why we have to rebuild those nations. That's where we can talk about self-government, but that's down the road. We all know that, but it's time to plant the seeds today, to not lose another generation of people. That's what is key. Let's not lose another generation of aboriginal peoples because of partisan politics.

• (1035)

The Chair: You are suggesting that it would be better that we have the ability to implement RCAP rather than the Kelowna accord.

Chief Patrick Brazeau: Yes.

The Chair: We still have two minutes. Are there any questions from the government side?

Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you very much.

I want to thank you very much for coming forward and giving us such an enlightened discussion today. In my short time in this committee, this has been, by far, the best discussion we've had.

We must have been talking to the same former minister, because the message he gave me is that we need to move away from the status quo and move ahead on bringing some accountability, in talking about some of the issues that first nations people, both on and off reserve, want to hear about in this country.

I live in a community where I speak with several aboriginal peoples, both on and off reserve, every single day, and the things they want to talk to me about aren't press releases. What they want to talk to me about are living conditions. What they want to talk to me about is accountability. What they want to talk about is bringing some hope to the first nations people.

I know you just recently held the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples general meeting here in Ottawa in November. You came forward with ten resolutions out of that meeting. I was hoping, Mr. Brazeau, that you could give us examples of some of those resolutions and some of the things that your organization sees that we need to move forward with in the future.

The Chair: Can you be concise? You only have just over a minute.

Chief Patrick Brazeau: To be really quick, some of the resolutions are to engage in bringing about more accountability within the organization and in being more forthright about membership lists that we were going to be working on, consulting our people within the next year, so that we're in a position about a year from now to say exactly how many members are in the organization.

That doesn't stray from the services we provide on behalf of or offer to aboriginal people across the country. It's to work towards implementing some of the RCAP recommendations, including possibly having a discussion on the issue of Bill C-31, which is very important, because it's outright discrimination. It basically allows the federal government to decide who is a status Indian and who is not. In my family I have nieces and nephews who are non-status Indians, and on my side my children are status Indians. That makes for a healthy debate at Christmas time.

It's basically to move forward to demonstrate our true representation, our legitimacy within the organization, and to demonstrate to the Canadian public, the taxpayers, that the funds we receive, although very small.... We receive an annual budget, including programs and services core funding, of \$5 million. Out of that \$5 million, half is disbursed through our provincial organizations so that they can provide services.

So we're not talking about a lot of money within our organization. It's to demonstrate to the taxpayers that with the moneys we receive we are going to provide results with the funds and are going to make significant changes in the lives of people, whether being funded or not.

The Chair: Thank you.

Hopefully we can continue with this debate another time.

Ms. Karetak-Lindell, please.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Thank you.

It's very interesting to hear where everyone is coming from today; it's almost like very selective hearing. I believe on Tuesday we heard very convincing testimony that people across the way are totally willing to forget.

We talk about elections and people who are elected to represent people. We heard from three people who are duly elected and who speak on behalf of many aboriginal people. That's not discounting that you're elected also, but I believe it's very selective hearing. It plays right into what I have observed over the years, that people who don't want to agree with what the majority of the people are saying as far as leaders are concerned will pick and choose whom they want to hear, depending on what the message is.

All it brings is an opportunity for a government to be able to say there's no unanimity among these people. As long as they're fighting with each other, we don't have to do anything about the situation. Let's just let them fight over the resources we have, and we'll get nowhere.

I've been sitting here for nine and a half years listening to that kind of conclusion. I thought we'd moved beyond that. I would like to think we've moved beyond it.

I totally agree with where the friendship centres are coming from—that you are serving a lot of people who are falling through the cracks.

Yes, we can call any agreement any name we want, but I think we all realize that the status quo cannot continue. I thought we had moved to a recognition accepting that we need some mechanism so that we can respect the wishes of the people, respect the relationships we have.

It's very disheartening to hear a parliamentary secretary get back onto technicalities, because it doesn't move the issue forward one bit. I understand where you're coming from. You're picking up people who are falling through the cracks. That's really what our reality has been. There have been many cracks, whether it's within our own aboriginal organizations or within the government system. I don't think any of us disagree with that.

But where I disagree strongly with the current government's way of dealing with issues is in the lack of recognition of and respect for the relationships that I thought our aboriginal organizations had graduated to in the last couple of years: they were sitting at a table with the Prime Minister and cabinet ministers and moving forward, recognizing that we need to deal with many issues, and not one of them being how you define who fits where.

I think we're mature enough and have as a people matured to a point where we can state, "This is where we want to be". We recognize that there is no one fix for all regions of Canada, but we certainly deserve the respect and recognition that we are speaking for certain groups of people and that there have to be different discussions on different levels.

Whether it's a Kelowna accord or something else, I think we have to get past semantics. When I listened to the leaders of Tuesday's presentation, I heard them keep talking about hope, that we have to keep providing the hope for our people that there is room for discussion—and compromise; we will always have to compromise, no matter who the groups are.

We're talking about Bill C-292, to implement the Kelowna accord. Can we all agree that it's a stepping stone to further discussions on dealing with many issues that are multi-faceted?

• (1040)

Ms. Vera Pawis Tabobondung: Most certainly, that is our view as we presented it, that we need that. But we need that "plus", in the sense that Chief Erasmus reminded me the other day when he talked about all the recommendations in our camp, that they came from solutions within the first nations communities, from within the aboriginal peoples. If we really look, we do have the solution, but if we never have the opportunity to have the dialogue and follow through to advancing it and to encouraging and supporting and talking amongst ourselves about what it looks like, then....

We could, and that's why we're saying it needs to be "Kelowna plus". This thing we take for granted on our table today is really what women in our nation have walked around all of the Great Lakes to bring to the attention of not only this country and the people of Canada, but of the whole world. We take this for granted. We didn't believe we would have to have our grandchildren pay \$300 for one ounce of water.

I think the spirit of how we move is in "Kelowna plus". It has to be a big heart, a big thinking, a big commitment, and a great belief in our abilities to work together, to advance—not only for my children and grandchildren and the great-grandchildren, but all of our children.

• (1045)

The Chair: Thank you. I'm not going to allow Mr. Brazeau to answer that question. Unfortunately, we are out of time.

I want to thank the witnesses. I want to assure the committee members that the fact that we may have dissenting opinions from the witnesses doesn't mean that we just count the last witnesses we had. I think there's a balance. That's what healthy debate is about and how healthy debate brings good solutions.

I really do appreciate the witnesses today. Thank you for all your knowledge and insights. We'll be working with you to move forward those recommendations and meet those challenges you are faced with.

Thank you.

I'm going to suspend for two minutes to clear the room, because we are going to go in camera, please.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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