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Chair

Mr. Bruce Stanton

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•(0900)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC)): Good day, Minister, members of the committee and invited guests. This is the second meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

[English]

This morning we're delighted to have the minister with us for the consideration of supplementary estimates (B). With the indulgence of members, we're going to start with the minister's presentation. We typically allow the minister a little bit more than the normal ten-minute presentation.

You have 15 minutes, Minister, and then we'll proceed to questions from members.

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to your colleagues as well for inviting me to appear here this morning. Congratulations on being elected to the chairman's role. It's an important role, as all of these committee positions are.

I want to reaffirm my belief in the vital work that all of you do in the democratic functioning of our country. It's particularly important, of course, that I make myself available. I want to share my views, respond to your questions, and of course be held accountable. It's a delight to do that and it's an important part of the parliamentary cycle as well as the democratic situation we're in.

[Translation]

This committee was very productive last year, passing five bills in the 39th Parliament. 2009 also promises to be a busy year. I have already tabled Bill C-5 and Bill C-8 and I look forward to working with this committee in the coming weeks.

[English]

As you know, I've come here particularly to discuss supplementary estimates (B) of the department. That's the strict purpose of my appearance, but since we have just begun a fresh session of a nearly new Parliament, I believe it would be helpful for all of us if I went a little further than just the supplementary estimates (B).

I'd like to take this opportunity to quickly share my views, not only on these estimates but also on my department's mission, our recent achievements, our current priorities, and the concrete steps we intend to take in the weeks and months to come.

At the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, we are really focusing on six overarching tasks: working with our

partners to resolve outstanding land claims; helping first nations communities achieve genuine self-government; investing in schools and education services for young members of first nations communities; protecting vulnerable members of first nations communities and empowering aboriginal Canadians generally to overcome the distinctive challenges they face; spurring economic growth in first nations, Inuit, and Métis communities while strengthening the foundation of these communities through investments in their basic infrastructure; and leading the development and implementation of an integrated northern strategy that focuses on Canada's sovereignty, protecting our environmental heritage, promoting economic and social development, and improving governance so that northerners have greater control over their destinies.

In the three years that this government has been in office, we have made good headway on these broad themes. Progress on these matters has always been a springboard for the federal government to go beyond the strict confines of its traditional tasks and take action that will have a long-lasting impact on the lives of aboriginal Canadians on reserve and off, in all regions of the country.

Two examples of our government's progress come quickly to mind. The first is the decisive steps we took to resolve lingering differences between many aboriginal Canadians and the crown. The Prime Minister's apology to former students of residential schools and the approval of our government of a final Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement are the most vivid expressions of Canada's desire to heal old wounds, wounds that have not only soured relations, but also have hindered efforts, I believe, to carry out vital work.

By taking these historic steps, the Government of Canada has not merely redressed grievous wrongs of the past. I believe we've also positioned ourselves to deepen and expand our partnerships with aboriginal Canadians and cultivate important new partnership opportunities.

These partnerships work, Mr. Chairman. Surely there's no disagreement about that. The list of partnership success stories is lengthy. It's too lengthy to recount here today, although I hope to get into some of that in the Q and A period. There are partnerships with provincial and territorial governments, with communities across the country, and with national and regional aboriginal organizations.

•(0905)

[Translation]

These vital relationships are the engine that have moved us forward and will continue to drive us ahead until all Aboriginal peoples in Canada can live fulfilling lives.

[English]

In September 2008 this government signed a protocol with the Métis National Council, as another example of a partnership, to begin discussions on a wide range of issues of interest to the Métis people represented by the MNC. Areas of interest include Métis/aboriginal rights, economic development, and federal-provincial Métis cooperation on socio-economic issues. That was an important protocol and it was a delight to sign that with President Chartier late last year.

The committee will recall that we started the fiscal year with \$6.3 billion in main estimates, and through supplementary estimates (A) we received an additional \$483 million, and this supplementary estimates (B) will include a further \$425 million, which brings the total department appropriations to about \$7.2 billion. This is in line with the planned spending forecast of about \$6.9 billion outlined in the report on plans and priorities, recognizing that the forecast evolves as new initiatives emerge and other initiatives get delayed.

Approval of the supplementary estimates (B) is critical to further developing successful partnerships. With adoption of these estimates, the Government of Canada will transfer \$275 million to the Office of Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada to help this agency carry out its work in implementing the settlement agreement. Again, this is the second way in which this government has used my department's mission as a springboard to achieve enduring results for aboriginal Canadians.

We've listened to aboriginal business groups and an impressive national advisory board, the Aboriginal Economic Development Board, to discover the distinctive difficulties they face, difficulties such as access to capital. Armed with this knowledge, we've worked with first nations Métis and Inuit groups to deploy new financial and administrative tools that entrepreneurs need to expand their operations, cultivate new markets, create jobs, and truly enter the Canadian economic mainstream.

Again, approval of supplementary estimates (B) is essential to spur even greater entrepreneurship among aboriginal Canadians, and with adoption of these estimates, the federal government will devote some \$20 million to help aboriginal entrepreneurs access business financing.

In this spirit of practical solutions that produce truly transformative results, we are also helping fund negotiating efforts. We're concluding comprehensive land claims and self-government agreements with first nations communities, and we're using the provisions of the Specific Claims Tribunal Act to accelerate the resolution of specific claims.

[Translation]

These are not timid actions. These actions help unleash the forces of economic growth and social development not only in First Nation communities but also in neighbouring non-Aboriginal communities.

[English]

Rather than continuing to rely on the failed approaches of the past, we're following this route—an accountable route, a prudent route, and a route that creates greater potential for genuine, enduring economic growth in first nations communities. It's a route that helps

aboriginal Canadians and their families pursue meaningful lives, and with each step along this path we're helping meet the day-to-day needs of members of all of these communities: needs such as safe drinking water; quality homes; and a solid education for their children.

Now supplementary estimates (B) gives us the financial resources to take action on all of these fronts. There is \$17 million to enhance education in first nations communities and nearly \$26 million to support the Dehcho First Nations as they negotiate comprehensive land claims and an interim measures agreement. There is \$21 million for the first nations child and family services program in Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan. It was a pleasure to sign those agreements; now we need to fund them, of course. Supplementary estimates (B) includes initiatives that total \$425 million, which increases my department's budget for 2008-09 to \$7.2 billion.

I'm pleased to report that this pragmatic, focused approach is reflected in the federal government's recent budget. From the standpoint of my department, Budget 2009 vividly demonstrates that an effective response to Canada's global challenges requires an even sharper focus on addressing the short- and long-term challenges that aboriginal Canadians face. Armed with that knowledge, we're working diligently to ensure that aboriginal Canadians play an even more vital role in Canada's economy. We're making \$1.4 billion worth of sound investments to support these efforts: investments in training and skills development; investments in on-reserve and off-reserve housing; infrastructure; investments in health; water systems; and family and child services.

At the same time, Budget 2009 includes vital new measures that will protect and secure Canada's sovereignty and create more economic opportunities in the north. These measures support economic development and include investments in infrastructure, measures to increase the stock of social housing there, to bolster scientific research, and to improve and maintain sound environmental practices.

One of the economic development measures that I'm most excited about—and that we certainly campaigned on—was the new northern development agency. Budget 2009 provides \$50 million over five years to create this stand-alone agency for Canada's north. It was something that was in the 2008 Speech from the Throne.

One of the core activities will be to deliver strategic investments in the northern economic development program, the SINED program. Everywhere I travelled in the north, I heard that this needed to be renewed, and it was renewed in Budget 2009 with funding of \$90 million over five years. This will be a pillar of Canada's northern strategy and it will help us coordinate our efforts to help northerners build prosperous communities. We'll be working with them to build better futures for themselves and their families in the land they call home, which is an important part of Canada all of us appreciate.

These investments and measures, and those outlined in the supplementary (B) estimates, are the direct result of extensive consultations undertaken by me, the Prime Minister, and many other ministers, working with provincial and territorial governments, with aboriginal leaders, and aboriginal organizations. In fact, the Prime Minister had a lengthy private meeting with the leaders of Canada's five major national aboriginal organizations. He then followed that with a second working dinner with the same organizations, their leaders, and the premiers at which the concerns of aboriginal Canadians and northerners were front and centre. They were very good meetings, very productive, and you can see the results in this budget.

• (0910)

[Translation]

The budgetary investments build on our recent achievements and reflect our current priorities. They are the concrete steps we intend to take in the weeks and months to come.

[English]

They also demonstrate forcefully that we're committed to ensuring that aboriginals and people living in the north fully share in economic opportunity and that we'll continue to work closely with provincial and territorial governments and other willing partners to ensure that Canada not only makes it through these tough times, but also emerges even stronger than before.

We're also, of course, committed to strong accountability to Parliament and Canadians. I look forward to reporting on Budget 2009 regularly, and we'll be tabling a progress report on water in the very near future, which I'm sure this committee will be interested in. In that spirit of accountability, I thank you, Mr. Chairman and your colleagues, for this invitation this morning, and I look forward to responding to questions and comments from committee members.

The Chair: *Merci, monsieur le ministre.*

Now we go to questions from members, starting with Mr. Russell.

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

Good morning, Minister and deputy ministers.

I'm glad you took the opportunity to move beyond the supplementary estimates per se.

I want to ask a question about the Indian residential schools and the additional money. Of course, we all know the importance of making sure that there is full and effective implementation of that particular agreement, and a vital part of that is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. And of course we've seen some setbacks in that particular regard. Can you give us a brief update

on where we are in that particular process? What are some specific timelines? As you know, there are a lot of elders in the communities who are looking forward to this particular avenue to explore healing and reconciliation in their particular communities and in their own lives. So I want to know that.

Then I want to move very quickly on to a couple of other questions, if I could.

• (0915)

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Thank you, Mr. Russell. That's a great question, and it's something that's top of mind for many people, and not just aboriginal people, of course, because the idea of reconciliation is for all Canadians. And I think we're all looking forward to the work of the TRC.

The TRC is, I think, back on track, if you will. Obviously, we had Justice Iacobucci, who chaired a committee of all the signatories to the settlement agreement—the churches, the Métis, the Inuit, the AFN, us. We were all there. We've gone through a process over the last couple of months to work on details, such as the governance structure, in more detail. It was spelled out by the court settlement. That was given to us by the courts, but what was clear was that everybody wanted to see more clearly what that governance structure might look like in actual fact in the day-to-day workings. It deals with things like the relationship between the commissioners; the setting up of the secretariat; the relationship between the commission and the secretariat, which is kind of the nuts and bolts of getting things done; the executive director's position; and the needed and welcome independence from the government, which is something we've insisted on and which, of course, is in the design of the commission itself.

Then in the last week or so, the other two commissioners issued a statement saying they have now resigned from their positions to give the commission a fresh start. The feeling now is that we can move ahead with a fresh start very quickly. Justice Iacobucci will stay in a position to kind of chair this committee. He's done some fine work to date, and the feeling from all of us is that he should stay in that position while we choose the new commissioners, because he not only was part of helping us put together the job description in more detail, he's also just been a good mediator, or a good facilitator, if you will.

That committee is now set up to choose the replacements. My deputy minister will be sitting on that committee along with senior representatives from each of those other groups. They can get down to work immediately taking nominations. And we hope that will be up within weeks. I'm not thinking it's going to take a lot of time.

Also, some of the work that's been done in the meantime—I mentioned setting up the secretariat, a lot of the nuts and bolts of getting the committee ready to go—means that these commissioners, when they're chosen, will be able to slip right in and I think start immediately, as quickly as they're willing to and want to. Again, they have complete independence, but I would assume they'll want to start immediately, and now the framework is there for them to do that.

Mr. Todd Russell: On a broader issue, you talked about an economic stimulus package. There is no mention of any stimulus for Métis organizations specifically within the budget. The Inuit organizations have indicated that there is very limited mention of their particular priorities when it comes to housing, for instance. There's no specific Inuit housing, although they're captured when it comes to some of the northern housing. But you take places like Nunatsiavut in Labrador and Nunavik in Quebec. You said you had consultations. Why was there not more in the budget to reflect the priorities of those particular organizations?

Secondly, when it comes to first nations, you talk about water and waste water. How many additional communities are going to be taken off the high-risk list? As I understand, you're going to be going down the list and just taking communities off.

When it comes to housing units on reserve, how many are projected to be built or refurbished over the two years with the additional stimulus?

Then, my final question, I know, is a bit long. Internal documents that your department has produced about the Indian government support programs have indicated that these programs are underfunded, that they're 25 years old, that in fact the first nations or tribal councils don't have the resources, either human or money. Even the program design is not adequate to deliver. Your own internal documents say that and they say that additional investments are at risk because of the lack of support under the Indian government support programs. Your own internal documents say you want to explore three options: a gradual approach, a transformative approach, or a legislative approach. You're recommending, internally, to go with the gradual change, which would increase funding by 25% to 50%. If you went with the transformative approach, it would be 50% to 100%. If you went with the legislative approach, it would be up to 200%. You've chosen the gradual one because it wouldn't trigger consultation. Can you speak to that?

• (0920)

Hon. Chuck Strahl: I'm not sure how much time I have to speak to all of that. These are all good questions, though. I think I will just repeat what I said in the last committee meeting. If I don't get some of these very specific answers, we will answer those in writing afterwards. If I can't get to them all and the new chairman here bangs the gavel, we'll move on, but I'll get to what I can.

Mr. Todd Russell: He told me he's liberal.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Yes, I know. He's very liberal. He's very liberal with his time. I think we'll just leave it at that maybe.

I have a couple of things. One, to start with, is the high-risk water systems. You're right. Of course, it is a big concern to us. I think there were 193 communities when we first took office that were listed as high risk. It's now down to about 54, so we've made some good progress and there have been major investments in water. We are launching this year, by the way, on the recommendations of both the Senate committee and other reports, a national assessment of water system requirements for first nations across the country. This is going to be the first time ever that we'll have an actual engineering assessment of the actual needs because a lot of it is anecdotal—you get a “boil water” advisory in a headline. So we know the need is there, but we've never had the actual assessment done properly.

So that's going to be done this year as part of the assessment and really to set priorities for those high-risk systems. The budget gives us money for at least 18 extra projects specifically in the infrastructure money. They tend to be, as you know, very expensive but very necessary. So this will give us 18 more projects, but the other funding continues on as well.

So it's not that we had budgeting in 2009 and the other things stopped. The things from 2006, 2007, and 2008 continue on. So we're going to continue on with our water and waste water action plan, which has brought it down from 193 to 54. This will give us another 18, and then the rest of the money continues as well.

The Chair: We really must go to the next question, Minister. Perhaps you could comment on that.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: And maybe some of them will come up in other questions from other people as well.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to the Bloc.

Mr. Lemay.

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): I hope you won't subtract from my allotted time the time it takes to adjust the interpretation.

• (0925)

Hon. Chuck Strahl: I'm ready, Mr. Lemay.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I know you're always ready, sir.

Since we haven't had time to see each other since last October's election, let me start by congratulating you on your appointment. I'm happy that you are the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, since this provides the continuity within the department that has been sorely lacking since 2006. Without exaggeration and with all due respect, it seemed like a new minister was appointed every two weeks. I'm assuming then that you are now quite familiar with your department. My questions will relate to the issues under discussion today.

Firstly, I would like an update on the Specific Claims Tribunal Act that you spoke of in your opening remarks. How many claims are now being reviewed and what is their status at this time? Did communities have access to this Tribunal, or was the money merely used to set up this body?

Secondly, you stated that the government signed a historic protocol with the Métis Nation last September. The Supplementary Estimates contain a reference to the Beyond Powley initiative. Substantial sums of money have been allocated to developing a framework for managing Métis Aboriginal rights. Further to the Supreme Court's decision in Powley, which dates back almost 10 years, has your department finally agreed on a definition of Métis? Have Métis communities outside of Western Canada been recognized? I'm talking about communities in Northern Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Are there any Métis communities in Eastern Canada, that is in the Maritimes, Quebec or elsewhere? Will this money go toward the management of Métis Aboriginal rights?

You briefly touched on the subject-matter of my second question, namely water initiatives targeting Aboriginal communities. Does this program apply only to communities governed by the Indian Act? I don't like to use the expression "non-status Indian", but does this program apply to communities located in La Vérendrye Park, in Winneway, in Abitibi-Témiscamingue and to several other communities "not yet recognized" under the Indian Act?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: I am delighted to be here today. You have a great deal of experience as an MP, Mr. Lemay. Therefore, you understand very well the situation, particularly in Quebec, and that's to our advantage.

[English]

The water initiatives I was talking about—the 18 new facilities we will be able to work on with this new money—are on first nations reserves, as is the program generally. The program is for working with first nations specifically on reserves.

Now, there are other programs the government has for water infrastructure in general. There are different ways that public governments and other governments can access money through other infrastructure programs, but our water and waste water management program is for on reserve. That's just the way the allocations go. And if someone is outside of the reserve system, then they need to work with Infrastructure Canada, and with other agencies, and with provincial authorities, local authorities, and their own authorities, to see how to handle that. But we restrict ourselves to working with on-reserve water systems.

On the Specific Claims Tribunal Act, which you mentioned, of course, we're very pleased with that. Actually, I do have a graph somewhere on the number of cases we've been able to deal with under the specific claims process, and we actually made some tremendous progress even before the Specific Claims Tribunal Act was in place. We've settled a record number of claims. I can get you the exact numbers, but we settled more than twice as many claims last year as any other year previously.

I think by the Specific Claims Tribunal Act being in the window—as you know, this is where it may go—I think negotiators on all sides have got more serious about settling these by negotiation. The Specific Claims Tribunal Act, which is a good way to handle these, is still an optional thing for first nations. They don't have to use it; it's an optional thing for them. But by having it out there as a place where they can go if they don't get satisfaction, I think all negotiators, both on the government and the first nations side, buckle

down and get the job done. And we've seen a record number of cases handled and a record number settled over the last year, and in part because of that Specific Claims Tribunal Act being there.

It's on track; everything's on track on the Specific Claims Tribunal itself. The secretariat is in place. There's, again, a secretariat to do all the nuts-and-bolts work of it. They're consulting with chief justices in each province to select the senior judges who will work on this. I know I've spoken with Minister Nicholson about this. This is a priority for me and for him, and I know he's doing consulting as well with aboriginal leaders and with National Chief Fontaine, for example, to get his input on this.

There will be the dollars allocated in the estimates for this. It's receiving claims; that process has started. There's a three-year timeline in there, and the clock starts ticking when first nations submit that claim.

So it's all in order, and again, I'd just emphasize that it's helped make the rest of the negotiations go well. And that's been, for me, an unexpectedly good side bonus because it's kept everybody on their toes, saying, "You either get it negotiated or you're going to be in front of the Specific Claims Tribunal".

● (0930)

The Chair: Okay, I think we have to sort of wrap it up there, if we can.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: The Métis one, we're going to do in a—

The Chair: I appreciate that. I'm trying to use some discretion here, but perhaps we'll come back.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: I would simply like to make one comment, Mr. Chair.

The Minister will probably not be able to answer some of the questions directed at him. Perhaps he could send a written response to these questions to the committee. The Métis question is extremely important. Perhaps the minister could respond quickly in writing after the meeting.

[English]

The Chair: That's a fair request.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Fine. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Now we go to Ms. Crowder for seven minutes.

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

Thank you, Minister, for coming before us today. I appreciate your commitment to following up, because I'm going to ask you a number of questions that I know you won't have time to answer today.

I want to follow up on the specific claims for just one moment. The initial plans and priorities documents that came out laid out some targets and timelines. I think we would welcome a report on what those numbers look like. The Indian Specific Claims Commission, in their report on plans and priorities, indicated, of course, that they were wrapping up operations at the end of December. When I was looking at the supplementary estimates, what I didn't see was whether the money was just rolling over from the commission into this new tribunal support function or not. I wondered about the funding around that.

In addition, I understand that some nations received a letter telling them that they had six months to file additional information, and that either they would have to stay with their old claim without the new information, or any new, additional information after that six months would actually put them into the queue with new claims. A letter was sent out by Grand Chief Stewart Phillip from the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs. I wondered about that process.

I have one other comment on the whole claims process. On page 80 in the estimates, there was funding under comprehensive land claims outside of British Columbia, but they've indicated in there that additional money has been asked for. Part of the ask was around "acquisitions and holding costs of surplus federal real property for comprehensive land claims negotiations". Of course, in many of our ridings, land is a huge issue. I wonder if a report can be made on surplus federal real property that's been acquired to help resolve some of these comprehensive claims, particularly in light of the fact that in the recent budget speech we heard about the selling off of crown assets. Certainly, first nations would like to be first in line with that.

On education, on page 151 of the supplementary estimates there is funding "to support the implementation of new accountability initiatives and tripartite partnership initiatives for First Nations education". I wonder if that funding will include things like implementation dollars for the British Columbia—First Nations Education Agreement. When you and department officials came before the committee back on May 14, Mr. Wernick and Ms. Cram both talked about the fact that the British Columbia—First Nations Education Agreement implementation process had not been sorted out. As late as December, it still had not been sorted out. I wonder if some of this supplementary money will go towards funding those agreements that are already in place.

As well, at the bottom of page 153, under the explanation under vote 10, it talks about the fact that "\$294,903 in total authorities is available within the Vote due to reduced contribution requirements for Community Infrastructure in order to increase grants for Education in Nova Scotia". We know there are serious community infrastructure needs. I wonder how it was possible to free up infrastructure money to put in grants for education in Nova Scotia. Although I would agree that the funding authority in Nova Scotia needs the money, I'm surprised that we would take money out of infrastructure for it.

The other two quick pieces are that I didn't see any money in the supplementary estimates for the implementation of Jordan's Principle, unanimously passed in the House of Commons, supporting the fact that two levels of government will put children first and not argue about who pays.

The last thing was on the PSSSP review that's under way in the department. It's creating a great deal of consternation in first nations communities because, in their view, they have not been involved in the consultation. I wonder if the minister could provide details on that consultation and if there's any intention around changing the way that funding is currently in place for first nations communities.

I know that's a lot. I know you'll respond to what you can and provide the rest in writing.

• (0935)

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Thank you.

Those are all good questions, and many of them have been in the news. I hopefully can answer a couple of them, and we'll get the rest to you in written form.

You're right about the consternation that's caused sometimes. Maybe it's the Internet age, I'm not sure, but if somebody has something that people are worried about, there's a problem of some sort, within a week it can be across Canada and you have to fight to get the actual facts out. Maybe this is a good chance to do some of that.

One example is your first question on the specific claims and updating their claims within six months. There's no requirement for first nations to update their claims at all. There's no requirement. They needn't fear that. They're happy that claim has gone in. It's in the condition they're satisfied with. The claim is solid. They're sure about their claim. It's been accepted. They don't have to update anything. It's ready to go, and it will be processed.

We said that if you have new information, something has come up, an archeological review or some other document, and you would like to update it as a first nation—you have new information that buttresses your arguments—then by all means submit it.

But if they're happy with their submission—and I assume people are happy with it if they've put it in place—and they want to update it, they have six months. If they say they have some new documents that make their argument even stronger, then they can add it. But there's no need. If they have a complete submission and they're confident in that, then that six months is only for their benefit, if they want to use it.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Minister, some of those specific claims have been languishing for over a decade. I think part of the concern is that the information originally submitted could have been dated but now they only have six months to add new information. That's my understanding of it.

● (0940)

Hon. Chuck Strahl: No. I mean, assuming—

Ms. Jean Crowder: Or they lose their place in the queue.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: You're right, there haven't been enough resources. We know that a lot of them have been sitting there for quite a long time. But the cases are solid. I mean, they have a case. They've given it. They're confident in their submission.

My assumption is that people will update their files all the time. If they get more information that makes their argument stronger, they're going to use that and put it back into the claims system. This assures them that if they have any information and they want to put it in, they don't lose their spot. They have six months to add it in. They can staple it on or however else they want to do it to make sure it gets in there. But again, it's only if they desire to submit that new documentation.

That whole effort was as a direct result of consultations with the Assembly of First Nations. This is exactly what they wanted. They can update their file based on new information and be confident they're not going to lose their spot. This allows them to go forward with confidence. Most of them, I assume, are complete. But again, to give them reassurance, this is not an effort to say you have six months or else. This is a situation where you already have something in place and you want to add something to it. Go ahead. That's all it is.

For others who are developing their cases right now and have not submitted them, they'll go through their regular process of getting the details. They might not submit it for two or three years—I don't know—but it will be up to them when they say their case is complete and they're ready to submit it. That's their timing.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: That's just for the existing cases. I want to assure people—it's important to do that—that this actually is a safeguard for them to say "I'm not stuck with this old information, because I have new and better stuff". The new and better stuff should be added in, and then it will go forward properly.

The Chair: Great. I appreciate your indulgence on that.

Certainly there were a number of excellent questions. We are running a little over time on each, so I beg the indulgence of members.

Now we go to Mr. Clarke. You're splitting your time. Is that right, Mr. Clarke?

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): That's correct, Mr. Chair.

First of all, Mr. Chair, I'd like to congratulate you on your seat here and chairing this committee with our first witnesses.

I'll be sharing my time with Mr. Rickford.

Thank you, Mr. Strahl, for coming to our committee today.

I just have one question.

First I'd like to give you some background: 62% of my riding is first nations. We have the highest first nations per capita in the smallest region in Canada. I myself am very proud to be first nations

and I have a lot of first nations relatives still living on the reserves. Being first nations is why I chose to be on this committee.

Education is very important for me. I attended post-secondary education, and without it I would not be where I am today.

I notice a lot of meat and potatoes in the economic action plan on which schools will be built. There are some partnerships in my riding in which first nations and Métis are looking at building schools together to help address the educational needs in the north.

I'm wondering if you'd be able to help me out and relay the government's action to address first nations education in this economic action plan. They are an investment in the infrastructure of Canada.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Thank you, Mr. Clarke. It's a good question, and I look forward to getting back to your riding again soon. As you said, there are lots of first nations folks and aboriginal people in your riding and in that northern region, so I look forward to getting back there as early as spring, I hope, to meet many of the folks there again.

The economic action plan is a good news budget for our department and for aboriginal people. This sets aside, in addition to our regular infrastructure money—in other words, all the money we currently spend on infrastructure and on maintenance...\$1.7 billion a year, in a general sense, continues on, but this extra couple of hundred million dollars on the education side will allow us to build ten new schools and do three major renovations this coming year in addition to our other work that we already had scheduled. This is going to take a little bit of the pressure off. There are lots of needs out there, of course.

We're working with our national priority ranking framework. We've put a system in place, first of all, where the need is the highest, based primarily on health and safety issues, readiness to go ahead and so on, and this money is part of the stimulus package so we want to get it out quickly. Those schools will be started this year, and we look forward to that.

We have started many other things. For example, I announced the student success program and the partnership program just last fall. This is money on an ongoing basis of about \$75 million a year to work with first nations schools and to develop individual students' success plans, partnering with provinces wherever possible. We're looking forward to a very aggressive educational plan.

● (0945)

Mr. Rob Clarke: This is good news.

The Chair: That's the halfway point. It's your seven minutes. How you want to split it is your call.

Carry on.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Thank you for your generosity, Rob. I appreciate that.

Congratulations, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister Strahl, for being here today.

I have two rather pointed questions around water and waste water infrastructure.

I'll probably take half a minute, for the benefit of the minister and perhaps the committee, to tell a little bit about my riding. It's one of the larger ridings in the country. We have more than 40 first nations reserves, and 25 of those are isolated; that is, they are accessible only by air. And 40% of the population of my riding are first nations. I have had the distinct privilege of living in most of those 25 isolated communities as a registered nurse over the course of about six years, and two in other parts of the country, mostly through the nineties, where I had a not-so-great experience with the availability of water and water treatment.

I'm pleased that this government took the appropriate steps to consult with the AFN to try to assess the extent of what was required.

My questions now simply are these. Are the additional investments in water and waste water infrastructure on reserve new money or is this part of last year's budget, the 2008 commitment of \$330 million?

How will you be determining how to spend the additional money?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Thank you. That's a good question, again.

Again, the good news is that it is additional money that's been announced. This is \$165 million of the \$515 million of infrastructure spending that will target water and waste water projects. That's in addition to the money you mentioned from previous budgets. So again, it will take some of the pressure off and will allow us to continue other work we're already doing. It's important work, and it's part of an action plan that's been laid out and that people have been able to buy into. This is in addition to that, so it will, as I mentioned, allow us to target I think 18 new projects.

They tend to be very expensive, because, as you said, they're often remote and hard to get to, so they're expensive to build. But they're critically important, not only because people need decent water to drink, but because water plays into everything else that happens on that reserve. You can't have an economic development plan if you don't have clean water. You can't develop a good school if you can't drink the water at school. Without clean water, you can't do any of the other measures that we would just take for granted in other communities.

So the clean water action plan and this additional money is going to help us. As I mentioned, we've reduced the list from some 190 to some 50, and that's good progress. But in the remaining communities and in the long-term management of all those communities, we have to have a really good action plan. This is going to allow us to do all of that going forward. So I'm delighted with this extra money.

The Chair: Great. Thank you.

That's the end of the seven minutes. I appreciate that. We'll come back. We're now going to the second round of questioning.

I would just ask members who wish to get on the speaking list to catch my attention by raising your hands or by letting the clerk know so we can put you on the list. We'll proceed on a first come, first served basis.

Now we go to Mr. Bagnell for five minutes.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for coming.

Just to let the officials know, so you can get to the right pages, my questions are going to be on Yukon self-government, PSTAs, and the Teslin Tlingit Council justice agreement.

Minister, as you know—and we talked a couple of weeks ago—this is probably the biggest issue for Yukon first nations. They've had a nine-year review. I think they're in year 11 or 12 or 13 of that, and they seem to have had a problem getting consistent negotiations and a negotiator with a mandate from the department. I know you're on top of this, and I'm hoping this will be resolved soon. I'm just wondering roughly how much is set aside. If it's internal—it might be internal reallocation within the department—where might the money come from?

● (0950)

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Thank you.

No, the money is not earmarked in the estimates because it has not been negotiated, so I can't earmark it. Once the mandate is established and the negotiation is successfully completed, which we hope to do soon, we'll have the actual dollar number and we can put it in the estimates. But right now, it's not there, because we're still in the negotiating stage.

As you know, we had a good Yukon forum last year, which I attended with Andy Carvill and the rest of the first nations, both those that are involved in the self-government agreements and those that aren't, as observers. We had good discussions and a good protocol for those discussions and for some of the detail work we were able to do with both the Yukon government and the self-governing first nations. They did good work helping us inform that mandate. It was very useful to talk about where the money is being spent, and how, and what their requirements are. They're making a case that they have been kind of the first out of the block, if you will, so they've learned a lot, and we're learning with them what it actually costs to be self-governing first nations.

They've done remarkably well when you think of it, considering that they were the first ones. They've done a remarkable job, and Premier Fentie is quick to remind me steadily that this is really a template in many ways for successful self-government agreements across the country. So the Yukon has done a tremendous job. The Yukon first nations have as well.

I'll be meeting again with Premier Fentie and the first nations who are coming here for Yukon Day in Ottawa shortly. Let's put a little plug in, Mr. Bagnell, for Yukon Day, which is coming up here in Ottawa. And I know that a series of meetings has been set up with everybody from Finance to me, and many other ministers to talk about all the issues in play and about implementation renewal. So we're getting very close, and I'm very hopeful that we'll be able to drive that to a conclusion soon.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Do you have any idea what "soon" might be? I know before the election even, at that forum that you referred to, you committed to getting a mandate. The studies have all been done. People know what the costs were. It has been done for years now. How soon do you think this might be resolved?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: With negotiations, I'm loath to give an actual date. I can't know how that nitty-gritty of negotiations will go, but I think we're narrowing the gap, if you will, or expanding the amount of knowledge and narrowing the gap between us as to the issues at play. So I think we're getting progressively closer. This meeting that we're going to have here during Yukon Days is going to help us.

Did I mention Yukon Days? You should be part of Yukon Days here in Ottawa.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: What about the Teslin aboriginal justice strategy? How's that coming?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: What part of it?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Well, once again, they've been actually negotiating for over ten years now. So is the money in place? Can we get going with that?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: I'm not familiar with this. I think it's mostly negotiated through Justice. It's more of a Justice issue.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: I think the funds are coming from INAC, though. I think you're right. It's Justice that is doing the negotiations.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: I'm going to have to get back to you, Mr. Bagnell, because I don't have that detail. The Justice issues are typically negotiated through the Justice department. I don't want to say we play second fiddle, but we have to make sure that what we're doing there is consistent with the objectives and the plans of Justice.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: If you could, that would be great.

On the waste water issue across the country, as you know, audits have been done right across first nations, and this money is set aside. That's good. How much do you think, over and above everything that has been set aside so far, will be needed in the future to complete all the systems in the country, based on the audits the department has done?

• (0955)

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Has that contract for the engineering been let yet?

Mr. Michael Wernick (Deputy Minister, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): I think the RFP is out. That's why we're doing the engineering. So we would see...here are the systems and there are the standards and what's the gap to be filled? We'd be able to give you that number when the results of the engineering study come in.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: On the engineering study, the RFP went out. I don't know if it has been let. It would be right about this time, and the engineering study will evaluate all of the first nations across the country in a technical way. Based on that, I think we'll be able to start developing that, not only with a long-term plan, but we'll have numbers then, and we'll have a much better idea. That has been one of the problems that has been clearly identified. We just don't have that kind of detail, so every year we throw some money in the pot, but no one is quite sure if that's enough because it has not been analyzed. This engineering study will help us do that.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now we'll proceed with Mr. Albrecht.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for being here today.

I noted with some great degree of satisfaction the number of times throughout your comments this morning and in the paper you referred to economic development. It's sprinkled throughout. It's almost on every page, and on some pages it appears many times.

Many aboriginal leaders and business people have written over the last couple of years about the importance of the economic development among their first nations communities. Last year a number of us from this committee had the privilege of travelling to Iqaluit and Pangnirtung to see some of the benefits of SINED investments. I noted in our budget as well that we're talking about the new economic development agency for the north. I just wondered if you could help me and the committee understand how these agencies, SINED and this new economic agency...with the additional \$50 million. If we could have a snapshot of some of the investments that have been made and are planned, that would be helpful to me.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Thank you.

Certainly in my travels, during the pre-budget consultation for sure, people were desperate to know that the SINED funding was going to be extended. It's been a five-year program, and it predates our government, but because it was a new program it didn't really get up and running for a couple of years. So, really, the impact of the SINED, which is really the only strategic investment we have for the north, has been most acutely felt in the last three years. It has been greatly appreciated. I heard that everywhere I went. They said just make sure you get that renewed because it's really the flagship of our northern strategy when it comes to economic development. There really is no vehicle except SINED. So extending that SINED for the five years and funding it well was critically important, and it's in the budget. That program is up and going. We can give you lots of examples of how it works, but it tends to involve small businesses, everything from environmental cleanup to tourist activities. Whatever the local needs are, it tries to fill those gaps.

The stand-alone agency, though, is also important I think for a couple of reasons. One is it's one of the last areas of the country that doesn't have its own economic development agency. It's important that it be there for the north, because the northern situation is very unique, as we all know. So if you're trying to pick winners and losers from Ottawa or Chilliwack or somewhere else, it's impossible to do a good job of that. We want the northern development agency to be a stand-alone agency that will be housed in the north, with people living in the north, by and large, looking after its application.

Not only will it be useful for economic development, but as we saw in the budget, other programs are often administered by these economic development agencies. For example, the packet of \$1 billion that's in the budget for communities under stress is going to be administered by the economic development agencies. So we're going to be able to use the agencies to get that money and access the portion that applies to northern communities that fit the criteria. That northern development agency is going to help businesses, but it can also be used by the government to put other programs into play. We've seen that in my case with the WED frequently. They're the agency that gets input from HRSDC, along with a little from Industry Canada and a little bit from infrastructure, and they put together a package that actually makes a project successful. We need that in the north. That's why it's pretty important, and I'm delighted that this funding is in there for northerners.

• (1000)

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I would just like to clarify something. In the area where I live, we have what's called the Community Futures Development Corporation, which is run by local entrepreneurs who understand business. In addition to the funds they receive, there's coaching to help these businesses get started and manoeuvre through those early years or some of the stresses they're facing, so that's part of it as well.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: The Community Futures thing is the same where I live. Community Futures, depending on where you are in the country.... I'm not the minister there, but my sense is that it has been tremendously successful in some places because there are so many volunteers who give of their time in mentoring and helping fledgling businesses start and so on. A lot of it depends on which town you live in as to whether it'll be exactly that Community Futures model. I think we have to be sensitive to the northern reality, and if that's the kind of model that will work, then I think we should follow it.

We don't want to be too prescriptive too early. We want to work with northerners to see what is going to work, and if they say that's the model that works for them, then we can chase that further. I think it's important to say that the northern reality is that a lot of communities are hard to get to; there are a lot of transportation issues. We need to ask what it is they need, and then we'll fine-tune this agency to make sure it fits that need.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Right.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Minister, I've been informed you have another commitment. Certainly I know the committee would appreciate the amount of time you have to spend with us. We can proceed with questions for as long as you're able. I know your officials have agreed to remain and continue with questions from members.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: I do have another appointment. I appreciate the invitation, and I'm always delighted to come. But because this week was already scheduled, I do have another appointment I have to get to, so I'm going to have to take my leave, Mr. Chairman, if I can, and leave Mr. Wernick and Mr. Yeates to handle the questions. Of course, the number cruncher over here, Mr. Quinn, will be happy to get into any of those other details on the numbers.

We'll be happy to answer any questions that aren't answered in the next hour. We'll happily answer them in writing, and we'll get those details for Ms. Crowder and the rest.

[Translation]

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm very sorry, but I have to leave now. I have another commitment.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We should properly welcome the minister's officials here this morning. We have Michael Wernick, who is the deputy minister; Neil Yeates, who is the associate deputy minister; and Jim Quinn, the chief financial officer to the department.

We're going to continue with the second round of questioning, which we're partway through. It's a five-minute round.

[Translation]

We will now go to Mr. Lévesque.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Good day, Mr. Wernick, gentlemen. I will get right to the point, as I only have five minutes. The budget provides funding for northern development. I've tried to find some funding earmarked for Nunavik, but I've had no luck. I haven't found anything in the budget about housing initiatives for Nunavik. I'd like to know if the department has any plans in that regard.

Mention is made on page 7 of entrepreneurial assistance for First Nations, specifically Aboriginal peoples. I hope that this assistance will be provided to all First Nations, including the Inuit. I'd like to know how much funding will be available for this initiative. To what extent will the department be able to help contractors working on reserves and in First Nation communities?

There is one other point that I would like to bring up. I do not want to call into question the department's decision to place selected communities under trusteeship, but we all know the kind of problems that arise when a decision like that is taken. Contractors who live off reserve in Quebec have undertaken some major projects. These contractors, who in the past were paid on a regular basis—in small increments, mind you, but nevertheless they were paid regularly by the community—are now seeing their payments suspended for a period of one, two or three years. I don't know how long the trusteeship arrangement is going to last, but once it's over, communities that are looking to move forward with some big projects will be very hard pressed to find contractors willing to take on the job. This situation could endanger the health and safety of these communities. I'm wondering if these budgets could provide some kind of funding, prior to the trusteeship arrangement being put in place, to compensate companies that have carried out real, much-needed work.

•(1005)

Mr. Michael Wernick: Thank you, Mr. Lévesque.

Let me clarify one thing. As far as Nunavik is concerned, northern initiatives such as the Northern Development Agency and the Northern Housing Initiative target all three territories. We are working closely with government agencies like HRDC, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the Quebec Department of Economic Development to ensure that there are no oversights where Northern Quebec is concerned. In terms of the projects and initiatives contained in the budget, I hope that these will benefit communities in Northern Quebec and Labrador. We have been holding talks with these agencies since the budget was brought down. If there are specific problems, I am more than willing to discuss them with my colleagues from these departments and agencies.

With respect to entrepreneurship, let me just say that the government launched two pilot projects shortly after Christmas. I believe the exact date was December 29. One program, the Loan Loss Reserve, was introduced to help Aboriginal entrepreneurs to obtain financing from a non-government source. Aboriginal communities also have an opportunity to take part in natural resources and energy development projects. As you know, the Aboriginal Business Canada program provides support to SMEs, that is to Aboriginal entrepreneurs. Métis and Inuit entrepreneurs qualify for assistance under this program. If you have any specific

questions, we will certainly be happy to discuss the matter further with you.

Regarding communities under trusteeship, generally speaking, it is the responsibility of the manager on site to settle the affairs of the Aboriginal government and to pay any debts. What we are dealing with here are financial management problems and a financial situation that is somewhat out of whack. It is the manager's job to handle the situation. He must act on the basis of priorities. For example, if debts are related to unpaid contracts, then the trustee can settle them.

[English]

The Chair: Unfortunately, Monsieur Lévesque, we're out of time. These five minutes go very quickly.

Now we'll go to Mr. Payne.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to congratulate you on your appointment, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank our departmental officials for appearing here today, and the minister.

I have a couple of questions I'd like to ask the department. Last year you announced the construction of five new women's shelters, and I would like to know what the status of that is. What expenditures were there for these facilities?

My second question would be on Bill C-8, the MRP bill. Could you tell this committee why you think this is such an important bill that it's being reintroduced at this time?

Mr. Michael Wernick: On the second, I think you should probably ask the minister. It's a matter of policy. The government thinks it's important to pursue this. The bill was part of the 39th Parliament and would have been considered if we hadn't had the interruption of the election. It's now back and being retabled for this Parliament. I think you'll have ample opportunity to question the minister and other witnesses on it.

It's an initiative to close a gap. There are no clear rules for what happens in the case of a breakup of a family on an Indian reserve in terms of distribution of property and real assets. It's an attempt, after long consultations and many attempts, to close that gap so that just as happens off the reserve, when families break up or there are deaths in the family, there will be very clear rules and ways of resolving those issues.

On family violence, I'll flip to my colleague, Mr. Yeates, if you'll permit me.

•(1010)

Mr. Neil Yeates (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Thank you.

On family violence, we are proceeding with five new shelters across the country. Construction will start this spring, so they will be finished, we expect, during 2009.

In terms of new funding, there is \$55 million over five years to support the entire network of agencies.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Thank you.

The Chair: You have a few more minutes, but that's it.

We'll continue with Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: On page 151 of the supplementary estimates (B) it says, "funding for the First Nations Infrastructure Fund to improve quality of life and environment for first nations".

There are increases there. As far as I understand, the 2% cap is still in place. I know there's a very long list of requirements for infrastructure. There are a number of projects, like the long-term care facility for the Oneida First Nations, the Louis Bull lift station so they can build new housing, and the Lake St. Martin water control structure for flooding in Manitoba. There's a very long list. Given the 2% cap that remains in place, I wonder how some of these particular community needs are being met.

In addition, although infrastructure money has been used to build facilities in the past—for example, the Eskasoni First Nation in Nova Scotia has a new crisis shelter, but it's actually not functioning because they don't have any operating dollars. An article February 4 talked about the fact that this shelter sits unfunded amid the rash of suicides. I wonder where the connection is between the infrastructure dollars and the operating costs. It's fine to build facilities, but if you don't have money to operate them, it's not very helpful.

Maybe I'll leave it at that for a response.

Mr. Michael Wernick: Thanks, Ms. Crowder. We've discussed this before.

The first nations infrastructure fund is a new tool that we have. It was created in 2007 around the time the government made its arrangements to return gas tax money and GST money to the municipalities. We were able to get this new pooling of resources in the first nations infrastructure fund. It was launched, and it's proposal-driven to supplement our base programs. If there are any issues about the criteria on the Internet, I'd be happy to answer them.

The allocation was about \$125 million over five years. It's funded about \$100 million worth of projects already. It goes out in calls for proposals, and we hope to keep it going. It's done about 250 projects, everything from small road projects, waste, energy-related things; connectivity is part of it, and eligible categories. That sits on top of our normal community infrastructure programming and fills some gaps. They don't take big projects, but they do fill in some gaps.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Some of these other projects I mentioned probably wouldn't be eligible under this particular infrastructure.

Mr. Michael Wernick: You'd have to ask me about a specific project. Also, Health Canada would be the people doing nursing stations and those kinds of health-related facilities. One of the things we try to do is make sure that our programs, Health Canada's, and CMHC's housing, land, and the community are coherent, and that's a change.

Ms. Jean Crowder: So there is a coordination between CMHC, Health Canada....

Mr. Michael Wernick: Yes, the field people. We do about half of housing and CMHC does the other half at this point.

Ms. Jean Crowder: This is a long-term care facility for Oneida, so it wasn't....

Mr. Michael Wernick: I'll have to get back to you on the very specific thing.

To answer the question you're probably going to ask next, we do on-reserve and inside self-governing communities. We don't do off reserve. That sometimes comes up as an issue where there's an aboriginal institution, but it's not on a reserve or self-governing first nation.

The issue of operating dollars is a legitimate ongoing one. We try to provide transfers to first nations governments and the other recipients through the ongoing programs related to education, Health Canada for health, and so on. I'm not sure what to comment on that. That's true for all levels of government. Operating cost of infrastructure is an issue. I'm quite sure that all the municipalities that are going to get infrastructure out of this stimulus package will start asking about operating costs before very long. It's an issue.

●(1015)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Is there coordination with the operating funds when an infrastructure project is approved? A facility has been constructed and could be used.

Mr. Michael Wernick: The lists come from the communities out of their own planning processes and what they think they need. We're dealing in this budget with the so-called shovel-ready projects, which are pretty well advanced. That means the community wants them, they've done feasibility studies, the design and engineering work is pretty advanced, and they know they have to build that into their future costs. In many cases the new facilities are going to save them money because they'll be more energy efficient or they may save them from busing kids off the reserve and so on. The impact on the operating costs could be positive or it could be a burden for them.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Crowder, and Mr. Wernick.

Now we'll proceed to Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Duncan, we'll give you a little extra time here just to make up for the last shortchange. We have a few minutes left over, so if you'd like to indulge in an extra minute or so, that would be fine.

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thank you for coming to our committee meeting.

I have two questions. They are rather broad in nature.

The first is this. We've now tabled the bill to amend the Indian Oil and Gas Act. I'm wondering if you can describe some of the benefits that would flow to first nations from passage of this bill—which has been kicking around for a long time. And maybe describe briefly the centre for excellence that is empowered by the bill, not directly but very indirectly.

Also, we just had the United Nations periodic review of human rights, with Canada firmly as a target nation. We were reviewed. A lot of the subject of that review, of course, involved first nations and our aboriginal population. I wonder if you could briefly describe the status of that and what the departmental response at this point might be.

Mr. Michael Wernick: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Duncan.

On the Indian oil and gas bill, I guess it will be before you shortly if the House refers it to you.

In broad-brush, this is a regulatory bill. It deals with how oil and gas activity—drilling, exploration, production and so on—would be regulated when it's on Indian lands. We always have the issue of what are the rules of the game on Indian reserves. Sometimes it's fairly clear that provincial law applies. Sometimes there is a clear federal statute that applies. Sometimes there is a gap, as in matrimonial property, or water standards.

I would describe the Indian oil and gas bill as a massive upgrade of the “software”. They've been operating with rules that date from practices in the 1970s. This will allow them to move to the state of the art, the way it's regulated in Alberta, Saskatchewan, B.C., and other provinces, and allow them to update rules more quickly in the future.

The centre of excellence, as I understand it, is an initiative similar to other ones we have, which is to have some people who are really, really good at oil and gas issues help first nations governments deal with the companies, the industry, and the issues that come up.

On the periodic review, that's fresh off the press. My understanding is that it's of course a review of Canada's performance as a country. It's part of an accountability cycle that all countries go through. Canada being keeners, we're early in the process; all countries eventually will be reviewed over a cycle. They just finished the cross-examination. The report I think is coming out of the process this week, and then Canada has until June to respond.

I don't want to get ahead of myself. The Government of Canada and I think the Minister of Justice will be tabling a response to the findings of the rapporteur.

I guess the only comment I'd offer is that of course aboriginal issues came up prominently in the cross-examination and I'm sure they'll figure prominently in the report. This committee has been working on a number of those issues. You dealt with amendments to the Human Rights Act last year. You're dealing with matrimonial property this year, and I'm sure it will be an ongoing issue.

• (1020)

Mr. John Duncan: Thank you very much.

I've probably used less time, but I'm happy.

The Chair: Okay.

Now, committee, that essentially finishes our second round. We currently have two members on the speaking list at this point. I'm at your discretion here; if you wish to proceed with the remaining two speakers who are on the list, we can do that. We have a third now. We can go through the next round.

We probably should leave a few minutes at the end, so that we can consider how we will proceed in wrapping up our subject today.

So if it is your wish, then we will go to a five-minute round and do the best we can.

Is that the wish of the committee?

Seeing no dissent, we'll proceed then with Mr. Russell.

Mr. Todd Russell: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here this morning.

I want to follow up on my earlier comments to the minister. What activities or analysis have you undertaken with specific reference to the Indian governance support programs? Some of the documents I have looked at present sort of a scathing picture of the current status of these particular programs and their inability in the 21st century to meet the challenges that first nations or tribal councils have to meet. The information I have points to the fact that you guys have been considering revamping the program without consultation, choosing an option that will be without consultation, and that would provide some increases in funding, but on the cheap, so to speak.

Can you comment on what you've been doing as a department to address this particular issue?

Mr. Michael Wernick: Certainly, Mr. Russell.

It's actually a set of five programs that provide basic support for first nations governments and different facets of their basic operations as a government. It's an old program; it's been around for as long as there have been first nations governments in the sort of modern sense of the word.

It's one of the programs that sunset. Most of our programs pop up—they're approved for three, four, five years, there's an expiry date, we have to go back and re-argue the terms and conditions of the program, go back to cabinet and Treasury Board, and get them renewed. We do probably a dozen renewals a year, at least. The first year I was here, we did more than 40. So we knew this was coming; the program expires next year and we'll have to go back and re-argue the case. So we are precisely going to consult the people affected by it before making any recommendations to cabinet, which has not looked at this and hasn't taken any decisions on it.

Mr. Todd Russell: Just to follow up, in some of the documentation it appears you want to use the word “engagement” with first nations, as opposed to “consultation”. Is it accurate that that's what some of the discussion has been about? And what would the difference be between “engagement” and “consultation”?

Mr. Michael Wernick: The lawyers' definition of "consultation", in the context of section 35 rights, is a pretty narrow one. I'm not going to debate that; I'm not a lawyer. You can ask the department. So there are obligations to consult aboriginal people on issues that may affect their aboriginal and treaty rights. We understand that. The government and all governments, including provincial and territorial governments, have to meet those obligations. It's debatable whether that extends to changes to programs and policies. You'd have to make a case that they affect section 35 rights.

Now, we consult, in the more general sense of the word, on just about everything we do. We wouldn't even contemplate advising the minister to change a policy or a program or a law without talking to people who are going to be affected. So we're out there talking to people about a number of issues, as you know, and happy to provide details on that.

On the Indian government support programs, I've had representations, letters, delegations, people coming in to see me saying, "You should do this, you should do that, you should change it this way", and so on. I'm quite happy to provide to the committee with everything we've got on the programs, and I encourage you to take a look at them, if that's the committee's desire.

• (1025)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): You've still got about a minute.

Mr. Todd Russell: Thank you.

Yes, we would love that information.

Are there rough estimates of the underfunding or the under-resourcing of the Indian support program to date?

Mr. Michael Wernick: You'd have to ask. I mean, I don't know how you would come up with that number. Everybody would like to have more money. You could pick almost any number for it. We've done evaluations of it and I think people who run first nations governments have a pretty good sense of what they think the basic costs are. These programs aren't for sort of extra program initiatives, and this is basically to keep those governments going, often in small communities and so on. I think we have some work done on that. We've done a study on these things as a program evaluation.

Some of the larger communities in Ontario feel that the program is too much of an average, that it doesn't reflect the costs of the larger first nations governments. It's fairly controversial, in terms of what the right formula is. It kind of reminds me of federal-provincial transfers.

Mr. Todd Russell: And we know about that very well. Thank you for reminding us all.

Thank you.

The Chair: That will wrap us up, Mr. Russell.

Mr. Wernick, thank you.

And now we'll proceed to Mr. Albrecht for five minutes.

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

I just want to follow up briefly on the \$200 million in Budget 2009 for the construction of new schools. The minister responded to

Mr. Clarke's question earlier, and near the end of his response he indicated that the needs are probably much greater, in fact, than the \$200 million. Now, the question I'm trying to get to the bottom of is what criteria are in place to determine which projects are highest priority? It's probable with the long list that many of these are shovel ready, as we say, but how will your department determine which community will have these huge renovations or new construction done?

Mr. Michael Wernick: I can provide detail on that.

Essentially what happens is we have a capital planning process. We have many needs in many communities, as Ms. Crowder pointed out. We do schools, water, waste water, electrification, roads, and so on—everything inside the boundaries of reserves. We run a set of regional waiting lists. We fund what we can each year based on priorities. The priorities in water are driven very much off that risk methodology that came up earlier. It's the same for schools; there are criteria. There's a lot of work done on what's the right size for how many kids; what kinds of facilities, and so on. We manage those lists as best we can with the money we get each year. We've had several exchanges with this committee about the rankings and the communities.

The budget came along as a bit of an opportunity to do more things over the next two years than we were expecting to do, so being shovel ready was not really a problem for us because there are a lot of communities and a lot of needs out there.

There will probably be a little push back on whether we've landed in the right places in terms of the needs that are out there, but these had to be ones where the design work was ready, the feasibility, the engineering. We weren't going to spend two years in community consultations about what kind of school and so on. The community, obviously, will make the final decision on what they want, and they will actually build the things. We provide the financing and they will do the tendering.

The minister will be in a position to meet the requirements of the budget to report in March, June, September, and December on the progress we've made.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Could I have another half-minute?

You may not be able to answer this, but are there concerns, with an injection of this amount of money, about whether there would be sufficient contractors able to expedite these projects if and when they are given the go-ahead, or will that be a challenge as well?

Mr. Michael Wernick: On the ones that were identified—we were a little on the conservative side—we're confident that those 10 schools and 18 water projects can be done. There is a risk that when they actually go out for tender, either the bids that will come in will be outrageously expensive or there will be nobody around to do the work. These are sometimes in remote parts of various places. But we're confident that these projects can go ahead, and if we can squeeze a few more out of our A base over the coming couple of years, we'll do those as well.

It is an issue. We can't guarantee the results of a particular tendering process.

The Chair: We still have a minute and a half.

Mr. Duncan.

•(1030)

Mr. John Duncan: Further on that infrastructure question, we are involved in an exercise with the broader community for infrastructure proposals and so on. In some cases they're adjacent to first nations or reserve communities. Is there any merger of interests here? It just occurred to me that I may be making an announcement on something that's adjacent to a first nations community, and I hadn't really considered that maybe they have the same...or that we could piggyback the two things and achieve some economies here.

Mr. Michael Wernick: That's an excellent question. I would say there's more and more interest on the part of first nations and their neighbouring municipalities to do joint projects, certainly more than you would have heard ten years ago. In some cases the common sense, cost-efficient thing to do is to build a facility off reserve and throw a line or connection out to the reserve community. That requires agreements and contracts and understandings about who's going to pay for what. There are a few cases where it makes sense to build a facility on the reserve and then serve the neighbours from that. We look for those opportunities everywhere. The people in the field are the ones who can spot those opportunities. We also try to share training and inspection wherever possible. If somebody is going to go out and inspect the off-reserve water plant, they might as well pop into the reserve, and so on.

That's part of the partnership theme the minister was talking about. Those were hard to come by about ten years ago, but we're now seeing more and more of them on the ground.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Duncan, Mr. Albrecht.

Mr. Lévesque.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: I would like to come back to a topic we discussed earlier, namely the trusteeship arrangement. I spoke with Mr. Sauvé from your office and he forwarded my inquiry to Mr. Dion in Montreal. Mr. Dion informed me that the trustee did not have the mandate to settle the community's debts. I was referring in this instance to the community of Rapid Lake. Under the circumstances, the entrepreneur would need to wait until the band council was back in charge to be paid. That could take a while and the work that was carried out in that community was fairly major.

Beyond that, when funding to a community is increased because it cannot operate in the black with its current allotted budget, is there not some sort of adjustment made to ensure that the community can

operate debt free with its new budget and can then continue to manage its own affairs?

Otherwise, the community becomes caught in a vicious circle. People have the choice between letting their old debts ride or settling them and racking up new ones. When it comes to adjusting the budgets, is there not some provision in place to allow communities to start over on an even footing and then continue to manage their own affairs?

Mr. Michael Wernick: You're getting into program specifics. I think I'd better reflect upon this further and give you my answer in writing.

Generally speaking, we try to avoid situations where a community becomes indebted to that extent. We create incentives to allow it to move beyond the trusteeship arrangement as quickly as possible. One of the first steps is to agree on a plan of action to get out of the debt situation.

You have asked some very specific questions and I will endeavour to provide you with answers as soon as possible.

The Chair: You have three minutes remaining.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Wernick, I know that you are going to provide me with your answers in writing, or that the minister will get back to me with an answer, but I would like to discuss the whole Métis question. In Quebec, we have received a number of requests for recognition.

How does one proceed to have one's Métis status recognized? Has the department established a process of some kind, particularly in light of the Supreme Court's decision in Powley?

Mr. Michael Wernick: Yes, the department does have a process in place in response to the Powley decision. This is precisely one of the responsibilities of the Federal Interlocutor. Plans and agreements have been worked out with Métis organizations to create member registries. However, the process has raised some legal issues of a constitutional nature. There are dozens of cases before the courts seeking a definition of a Métis and a decision as to the rights and nature of the Métis. What we have come up with here is a pragmatic, workable solution. We are working with a number of organizations representing non-registered individuals and non-registered Métis and Aboriginals. We are working with pretty much everyone we can to press economic, social and educational issues. I think that it will be up to the courts to settle the more basic, fundamental questions.

•(1035)

The Chair: You still have two minutes.

Mr. Marc Lemay: No, I'm fine.

The Chair: Alright then.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Mr. Chair, concerning Rapid Lake, could you suggest the name of someone with whom I might discuss the situation? You'll provide me with a name in writing? Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Mrs. Crowder now has the floor.

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you.

Just following up on the infrastructure question, did I understand you to say, on the ones I listed, those being the Oneida long-term care, the Louis Bull lift station and the St. Martin water control structure, that if I contact your office, you'll give me an update on them?

Mr. Michael Wernick: Yes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Perhaps I'm not understanding the numbers, but on schedule 1 to the appropriation bill in supplementary estimates (B), on page 46 under line 7(b), there's a substantial increase in the amount of loans that the minister may guarantee pursuant. I just wondered if that is in line of some anticipated settlements of some very large claims.

Mr. Michael Wernick: No, if I have the right amount, it's actually back-stopping housing loans. One of the problems with reserves is that it's difficult to secure a loan because the assets can't be seized, so the minister offers guarantees to the lender, and there's a default rate and so on.

Ms. Jean Crowder: That's in anticipation of—

Mr. Michael Wernick: We've just gone through a large re-basing to raise the ceiling on how many loans can be issued at any one time. They revolve in and out. It was in anticipation of doing more housing business.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Okay, good.

On page 152 of supplementary estimates (B) there was an amount of money that was allocated for the Peguis First Nation Treaty Entitlement Agreement, and it was turned down by the community. Does money just get put in reserve for them until they are able to work through a community process? They don't lose out just because they...?

Mr. Michael Wernick: That's one of the reasons it's difficult to give Parliament and parliamentary committees an accurate snapshot and why we have this discussion every time about planned spending. The money that tends to move across from fiscal year to fiscal year is precisely for large settlements and specific claims—a big lump of money will arrive in one year and ratification doesn't happen. We normally get complete cooperation from the Department of Finance and Treasury Board to simply move it over into the next year if indeed the settlement comes through.

Ms. Jean Crowder: There is a cap, isn't there, on the amount of money a department can project into the future?

Mr. Michael Wernick: That's for basic operating dollars, like salary and overhead and maintenance. We've never had a problem, when there is a litigation settlement or a claim settlement, getting the money out. It's just sometimes complicated to report it to Parliament.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Can I come back to that number that I asked the minister about, money that was transferred—

Mr. Michael Wernick: Can I just clarify on Peguis? Neil is correcting me on that.

There were actually two settlements with the Peguis community. This is the treaty land one, which is going ahead. It's not the specific claim.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Okay. This looks like an in-and-out on here. Oh, it just moves from one vote to another, okay.

Mr. Michael Wernick: Yes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: On the question I asked the minister about, the money that was transferred from the community infrastructure fund to the Nova Scotia education authority, can you explain this? We know there is a backlog in infrastructure dollars. I noticed on another page that they did talk about it, but I just wasn't sure how the numbers lined up.

Mr. Jim Quinn (Chief Financial Officer, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Yes, I think that is the amount of \$263,000 that's been moved from contributions to grants for the two schools in the construction period. When those schools are completed, there is an agreement in place that says they have to account for the operations and maintenance of those particular schools, so that money comes out of the contribution side and moves to the grants to run the facilities you were indicating earlier.

● (1040)

Ms. Jean Crowder: In effect, that would have already been agreed on in advance. It's just a place to park the money until the schools are completed.

Mr. Jim Quinn: There is an agreement in advance, that's right.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Okay. It's very difficult to explain that to people.

I have a quick question about being shovel ready. I actually did do a written question in the previous sitting of the House around that community infrastructure, and the list we got back was substantially on feasibility work, rather than actual projects. I don't have the list with me because I didn't anticipate getting an opportunity to ask the question today, but in your estimation, what rough percentage of projects are actually shovel ready, given the fact that there were so many feasibilities? I suspect many first nations simply don't have the funds to do the engineering and the permitting and all those kinds of things in this two-year window.

Mr. Michael Wernick: The department provides the money for the feasibility and engineering, so—

Ms. Jean Crowder: Given that these infrastructure dollars were being used for that kind of project, I wonder if in the hopper a significant percentage are shovel ready, since we're looking at a two-year window.

Mr. Michael Wernick: I'm quite confident that 10 schools and 18 water things are actual physical things you will be able to go and touch. They are physical projects that we're quite confident about. They'll also be real, physical construction and renovation out of the A base dollars, and we can report that when the minister reports in March, so I'm not worried about that.

Underneath that, though, as you know, there is a lot of minor capital and other things that are paid for through that budget.

Depending upon where the community is, they might be at the early days of design on a renovation for a facility they know is going to burst the seams because there will be too many kids five years from now, or it might be in a very advanced state of breakdown. That's why the health and safety are important criteria as well. We used a ranking system.

The Chair: I'm sorry, we're over time there.

Thank you, Ms. Crowder.

We'll proceed. The two last questions will go to Mr. Bagnell, followed by Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Thank you.

I will follow up on that question about the Yukon Métis. They have also been applying for operating costs.

My question is related to northern housing. I think it was around the time of the 2007 budget that the government got into a bit of a mess. Minister Prentice had said he wanted all the money to go to aboriginal housing—I think it was \$50 million—but it didn't go directly to first nations. They ultimately didn't get it all, so they were absolutely apoplectic that we've created governments and the money for them was flowing through other governments. It was actually listed in that budget, both under aboriginal funds and under northern housing for everyone.

It appears the same thing is happening again. I got a call from the northern vice-chief of AFN, who is furious again that there's \$50 million allocated for northern housing in the Yukon, but it doesn't specify how much is going to the first nations. It's also listed in the aboriginal section. The first nations don't know how much they're getting. Will it be flowed directly to them to avoid the problems there were last time? I wonder what the plans of the department are for flowing that money, particularly in the Yukon. It might be different in the other two territories because their political structures are slightly different. But how is that money planned to flow, and how will the first nations as governments get their allotments? How much might that allotment be? What are the plans for that? I know it's specified as generic for all northerners in the Yukon.

Mr. Michael Wernick: I can get you some more detail on that. There were two issues that came out of the 2006 budget, and I think you probably ran into both of them in the Yukon. There was a trust arrangement, which actually predates that budget. It was created by the so-called Martin-Layton deal that amended the 2005 budget, and the Harper government decided to use it. So there was a trust arrangement to get money to the territories, and then there was a separate trust arrangement for off-reserve housing that flowed to the provinces.

We've been getting feedback ever since about what the provinces did with that trust arrangement. Did it actually get spent or not? It's actually the provinces that will have to account for what they did with that.

The northern one did generate some issues in the Yukon about how much of the territorial money was going to flow through to the first nations. In this budget, it's not a trust arrangement; it's a straight

transfer to the territorial government. CMHC, I believe, is going to be the federal pen on this, and those discussions would be starting right now in terms of how they'll flow and what the territory would do with it. I presume we're going to have some serious tripartite discussions among ourselves, the Government of Yukon, and the first nations.

• (1045)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: So you see significant amounts of that money still going to the first nations?

Mr. Michael Wernick: It's a bit premature. I think we'd have to ask the Government of Yukon, which is coming for Yukon Days next week.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: I think we heard that quite clearly.

The Chair: You have another minute and a half, Mr. Bagnell.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: I just want to express the concern that the first nations of the Yukon certainly, as governments, want to be treated as governments and not have funds that are meaning to flow for them through other governments. We made those arrangements when we entered negotiations with them. To some extent, they have as many powers in some areas, or more, than the provinces—the Province of Quebec or Ontario—so they want to be treated with that dignity. When such arrangements are made, if this money was meant to go towards aboriginal governments, then it should be specified that it is doing budgets, and hopefully we can avoid such problems in the future.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bélanger has the final question.

[*English*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just have a couple of quick questions on the supplementary transfers. Can you tell me, on the transfer of \$1.6 million to Industry Canada to support the Mackenzie gas pipeline project secretariat, what percentage of that secretariat's budget does that represent?

Mr. Michael Wernick: A ballpark answer is about 10%, but I can give you a more accurate answer—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Is this an ongoing thing?

Mr. Michael Wernick: This is the secretary to the federal officials who are following the regulatory process.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: No, no, the transfers. Are they ongoing?

Mr. Michael Wernick: Yes. It moved to Industry Canada when Minister Prentice went to Industry Canada. They're the same people and the same offices, but they now report to Industry Canada, and we provided some of the operating costs for the secretariat through this transfer.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: How long is this funding going to go on?

Mr. Michael Wernick: The pipeline project is still proceeding—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: So as long as the project proceeds, the department will partially fund the secretariat?

Mr. Michael Wernick: I'm not sure how they'll get their money for the current fiscal year that is about to start. That secretariat will be operating in 2009-10.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you.

Can you tell me what the transfer is from Canadian Heritage for the “development of Official Language Minority”? It's a small amount, but what is its use and where is it going?

Mr. Michael Wernick: I could provide the specific details for you. This is part of the renewal of the official languages action plan. There was money provided to departments to meet their commitments.

We can provide you with details.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I'd just be curious to know. And the same thing about the other transfer for supplementary estimates (B), transfer 12—to Canadian Heritage this time—for aboriginal languages.

This is as a result of an agreement. What agreement is this? Is it an agreement between departments?

Could we see a copy of that agreement?

Mr. Michael Wernick: Yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: All right.

I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman, if I repeat some of these things; I had to be absent for a little while to table a petition in the House.

My principal question was to be on education, and I gather it has come up, so if I repeat something, I apologize.

The additional money coming from the budget just approved is to build ten new schools. Will these be replacements, or additional schools? Or do we know yet?

Mr. Michael Wernick: They'll pretty much be brand-new buildings. In most cases they will replace something that was there before.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: In most or in all?

Mr. Michael Wernick: I could get you the details once we've finalized the list. Ten of them are new and three of them are essentially renovations of existing structures.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: So they'll be additional schools?

Mr. Michael Wernick: Yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: All right.

Can you talk to me about the adjustments to the operational budget that have to come about because of the additional schools?

Do you have a problem with my asking questions?

The Chair: You have the floor, Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you.

Mr. Michael Wernick: The budget doesn't provide for any adjustments to the operating transfers. We have about a \$1 billion education program that flows out of the transfer agreements and we would adjust the agreements with those particular first nations to reflect the new situation.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: But if you add schools, presumably you would have to add to the operations budget?

• (1050)

Mr. Michael Wernick: They're always replacing something that was there before, which might have been energy inefficient and cost more to run.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: That was my initial question. Are these replacing existing buildings?

Mr. Michael Wernick: Yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Or are they additional schools, new schools?

Mr. Michael Wernick: They're new, but they're replacing buildings that were there before.

Sorry about the....

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: All right. Fair enough.

Can you tell me then, what will the \$17 million that the minister referred to in his speech be allocated for?

Mr. Michael Wernick: This would be the first installment of the new partnership program that was announced in December. In the last budget we obtained some money for education partnerships, where we would work with the provincial government and first nations organizations. Those are willing partner, large project-based things to move forward, and this would be an installment on that initiative, which I think, if you add it all in, was \$260 million over five years.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: And can you tell me where this particular \$17 million will be directed?

Mr. Michael Wernick: We'll be working that out through negotiations with particular provinces and communities.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: And the communities?

Mr. Michael Wernick: Yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: And the chiefs?

Mr. Michael Wernick: Yes, it's tripartite. If you don't have three partners, it won't happen.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Michael Wernick: It think it's largely a call for proposals, and the first call is out now.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bélanger.

On behalf of the members of the committee, I would like to thank the witnesses for their presentations this morning.

Go ahead, Mrs. Crowder.

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder: On a point of order, I noticed that when our agenda comes out, it normally reflects the amount of time that witnesses will be before the committee. So if the minister were only going to be here for an hour, it would show that the minister was going to be here from 9 till 10. But when I looked at this agenda, I assumed the minister was going to be here for the whole time.

I am just wondering if in the future the times that witnesses are going to be before us could be reflected more accurately on the agenda.

The Chair: Okay, that's noted.

You may recall that because of the shortness of time in this regard, we concluded that we would try to get the minister for as much time as he was available for. We'll continue with that.

Mr. Duncan, do you have a question?

Mr. John Duncan: It's in the same vein as Jean Crowder just asked.

When we got here, I noticed on the agenda that this meeting was to be televised. But we hadn't talked about that, and I'm not sure if we shouldn't be given some knowledge or notice of that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Duncan.

This issue was raised by another member this morning. I would simply say that in the normal course, in the absence of a motion to the contrary, and, again, in the shortness of time, the traditional protocol is that when a minister appears before a standing committee, the meeting will be televised. In the absence of a motion to the contrary, I chose to proceed that way, feeling there was a prerogative to do that. However, I'm at the indulgence of the committee on these matters. In fact, we're going to have a subcommittee meeting immediately after today's meeting and we can discuss these matters there. The committee sets the direction as to how we will manage our proceedings, and I'll abide by the wishes of the committee in that regard.

Just to finish this, members, we've now reviewed supplementary estimates (B). There were no motions for any reductions or any expressions of dissent in regard to these supplementary estimates. If it stands that way, it's assumed they're adopted and there is no need to report to the House.

If the committee is in agreement with that, we can adjourn. I would only say that at this point in time, there is not an item for business on Tuesday. However, as I said, we're going to subcommittee right away. So I think you should plan for our regular committee Tuesday morning, unless you hear otherwise.

Merci beaucoup.

The meeting is adjourned.

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