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# **Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, March 10, 2009**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Bruce Stanton**

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## Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

Tuesday, March 10, 2009

• (0900)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC)):** Good day, ladies and gentlemen. This is the ninth meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

[English]

This morning we have our orders of the day. We're delighted to welcome back the minister for consideration of supplementary estimates C. Members will know that we have one hour set aside for consideration of the supplementary estimates and then we will be proceeding to other business at 10 o'clock.

Minister, we're glad to have you back, and we'll proceed with your comments. It's normally ten minutes, but we have the hour, so we'll allow you to take your time and then we'll go to questions from members after that.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank you and your colleagues for inviting me to appear again before this committee.

[English]

It's good to be back. I'm not sure, but if we keep up at this rate we're going to set a record for being collegial with one another, and this is good. It's good to be back.

A few days ago I was here and I did have the opportunity to discuss Bill C-5, an act to amend the Indian Oil and Gas Act. As I said at that meeting, Bill C-5 has been a long time coming. When the bill is adopted, and hopefully that will be soon, the 130 first nation communities in our country with petroleum production or the potential for petroleum production on their lands will finally be able to manage their oil and gas resources using the most modern regulatory audit and oversight tools available. And equipped with these valuable tools, first nation communities will be ideally positioned to fully realize their economic potential—the potential of their own resources, really—and in their own way and on their own terms.

So Bill C-5 is an important and long overdue piece of business, but it's not the only item, of course, on our collective agenda. As you and committee members well know, several weeks ago we discussed supplementary estimates B of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development for the fiscal year that ends March 31, 2009. That's just three weeks away.

I will tell you that I did enjoy that meeting for three reasons. First, it enabled me to share with you my thoughts on our recent achievements, our priorities, and the concrete steps we've taken to achieve those goals up until now and what we hope to achieve in the months to come. Second, it was an excellent opportunity for me to outline some of the important investments we're making through the supplementary estimates process. And third, and perhaps most importantly, all of the questions you asked—the very informed questions, I thought—following my presentation gave us all a chance to delve into a number of matters, both when I was here before the committee and afterwards with officials, and even subsequent to that in written form where we tried to answer the questions given to me. And I hope that's been useful, as I think we all are trying to find the right answers and explanations for what's going on in first nation, Métis, and Inuit communities across the country.

These are all important issues. They include everything from new homes, modern infrastructure, better education and schools, state-of-the-art water and waste water systems, an accelerated specific claims process and the tribunal that guides that, and honourable and long-lasting land claim settlements.

Following on supplementary estimates B, supplementary estimates C contain several long-term investments that will help the government and our provincial, territorial, and aboriginal partners take greater action on many of these fronts. To be more precise, this version of the supplementary estimates includes initiatives that total just over \$118 million.

Before I go any further, I should point out that this \$118 million does not require Parliament to appropriate new money, other than an increase to a loan vote for the preparation and negotiation of specific claims. Spending in supplementary estimates C is largely covered by funds available within existing reference levels, primarily attributed to claims reprofiling. These funds are being used temporarily to reduce the amount of new appropriation required, and they will be made available for their intended purposes next fiscal year. As a result, this investment does not increase my department's budget beyond the current \$7.2 billion total for the 2008-09 fiscal year.

● (0905)

[Translation]

That being said, Mr. Chair, other specific investments listed in the Supplementary Estimates deserve mention. They are actions already taken to deal with some pressing issues, and I know this committee would want to be fully aware of them.

[English]

I know the committee wants to be fully informed or aware of these. Let's just go through them quickly.

First, we provided some \$54 million to help residents of remote and isolated communities who suffered undue hardship as a result of rising fuel costs last year. Just prior to Christmas last year, I had several people from the committee approach me, as did a couple of the leaders in the House, who were quite concerned about the rising fuel costs in some of these remote communities. It was in the news. This \$54 million was meant to address that hardship.

Secondly, we allocated approximately \$26 million to empower first nation communities to address urgent and critical needs brought on by fires, floods, and evacuations.

Third, we invested more than \$15 million to speed up even further our efforts to resolve specific claims.

And fourth, we added \$10 million to the food mail program. This program reduces the cost of shipping nutritious food and other essential items to northern communities that lack year-round surface access.

These were effective responses to immediate challenges.

I should also point out, Mr. Chairman, that supplementary estimates C include a \$44.5 million transfer between votes. This transfer allows the department to address critical pressures in the areas of fuel price increases for diesel generating plants on reserves; additional provincial education buildings for students from first nation communities who attend provincial schools; and the operation and maintenance of personal care homes in first nation communities.

Taken together, the investments contained in these supplementary estimates illustrate this Conservative government's focused approach to addressing the immediate concerns of northerners and members of first nation communities. Combined with the spending commitments contained in Canada's economic action plan, these investments also demonstrate that we're serious about addressing the long-term needs of men, women, and children in first nation and northern communities. In fact the government's approach can be summed up in three straightforward sentences. We're making pragmatic investments. We're working with partners. And we're getting results.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I look forward to answering your questions in the three areas: the investments we're making, the partnerships we've developed, and the results we're getting from those.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

We'll now proceed to questions from members, beginning with Mr. Russell for the Liberal Party.

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

Good morning, Minister. Good morning to your officials as well. It's good to have you here again.

In terms of the supplementary estimates C, you don't want any new money, basically, but you're reprofiling money, or taking money from certain areas that were already budgeted and applying it elsewhere. Specifically, what areas are we taking money from?

**Mr. Michael Wernick (Deputy Minister, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** It's a year-over-year profiling issue. These are largely claim settlements that haven't closed, so the money is not required in this fiscal accounting period. It will be used next year for those agreements that do close. So Parliament set aside money in anticipation of claim settlements; we don't need that room in our budget, so we're using it for these other purposes.

**Mr. Todd Russell:** According to our notes, a fair portion of the money is concerning the Cree-Naskapi claim and the new relationship or new deal that's been struck with them. Is there a delay in the implementation of this particular—

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** It's schedule of payments. There's no major holdup in the implementation that I'm aware of.

**Mr. Todd Russell:** So money you had budgeted to pay the Cree-Naskapi is basically not being paid out.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** It will be paid out in one year, as opposed to another year. It's just a question of which fiscal year it will fall into for reporting purposes.

**Mr. Todd Russell:** So will that impact them at all in terms of the programs, the services, or the types of things they want to undertake in their communities?

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** No.

**Mr. Todd Russell:** Okay.

Where else is money being taken from?

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** It's not a question of "being taken from"; it's money that's not being used in the claims settlement area. That's basically it.

**Mr. Todd Russell:** On the food mail program, it seems that every year, or at least in the last three years I've been here, the department comes back each and every year to ask for approximately \$10 million. It's always taking it from another area and putting it towards the food mail program, which I believe you pay Canada Post to deliver.

Why do we have to do this every year, year over year? It says here that it's exceptional, but it's not really exceptional, as it seems this is the third or fourth year this has happened. Is there any talk of bumping that program up? Because there seems to be a need year over year, over and above what's budgeted for.

● (0910)

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** I think the deputy would like to get into the technical part of it.

Certainly this last year we've started quite an extensive consultative process with communities and individuals and companies that make extensive use of the food mail program. The costs on the food mail program continue to go up every year, which is probably understandable. There have been, I'd say, quite a few complaints about how the system is run. In other words, as you say, it's a system that subsidizes nutritional food costs in remote northern communities, both in the far north and in the northern part of the provinces as well. There have been observations over the last couple of years, and probably preceding that. People say that it's a system that's been in place for a long time but it doesn't reflect modern reality. So some people have made suggestions on how it can be improved.

I actually appointed a special representative late last summer to start the discussions and make sure consultations started with those communities and companies and individuals. And there are lots of suggestions out there on how it can be made more efficient. There are suggestions on everything from points of entry—where those points of entry for food are located and designated—to how Canada Post itself does the contracting and allocations, and also on whether we should move to a more retail subsidy program rather than the food mail subsidy, because the mail system may not be the best and most efficient way to make sure that subsidy gets to the people who need it.

So all those things have been in discussion. What we've done—and you're right, we've done it again this year—is we've put that \$10 million into it, because we're not prepared to just jack the prices of food up through the ceiling while we do this review. So we've been doing this review, and it's ongoing, but it's been necessary to come back for that special allocation each year.

**Mr. Todd Russell:** We're talking about budgetary measures related to 2008-09, and you've just made in the last week three announcements regarding schools. It's my understanding that none of that money is related to the 2008-09 capital expenditure plan, but that it is in fact dealing with the stimulus.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** That's right.

**Mr. Todd Russell:** Now, there must still be money left or announcements to be made under the 2008-2009 capital expenditures plan regarding schools. Is that right?

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** Yes, although there are only three weeks left, so there won't likely be a lot of school announcements in the next three weeks from the 2008-09 budget. We're putting the final details together on the 2009 budget, the stimulus package, which involves ten schools and three major renovations, and there are a few more announcements to come out on that yet.

**Mr. Todd Russell:** So has all the capital expenditures money been allocated or announced for 2008-09? Has it been totally utilized?

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** Yes, pretty much. It's always ongoing. The whole budgetary process never stops. But as for the major announcements, I'm not aware of anything major—I think I'm right on this one—in the next three weeks that comes from the 2008-09 budget, other than, as I say, there's ongoing work on capital improvements. We spend hundreds of millions a year on capital investments through the regular budgetary process, so that will continue, but there's nothing hanging in the wings over the next three weeks.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** The only thing that would be left would be very minor repairs and things of a small nature. We try not to leave any money on the table at the end of the year, but it has to be properly contracted and committed before the end of the fiscal year.

**Mr. Todd Russell:** So under the stimulus portion of the budget itself, of course, we're looking for transparency and clarity. Is there going to be a sense, from our vantage point, of where that money's going to be spent, that new money, over and above what's in the A base or what's already planned for 2009-10? Will that be provided to us?

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** Certainly all of the money that was announced in the 2009 budget, the over-and-above money, if you will, for the ten schools and the three major renovations, was all identified in the preparation for the budget process. So the schools were all taken off our national priority framework, allocations were made. We made application into the system during the budget preparation period, after consultations with premiers and with aboriginal leaders and so on. So it will be perfectly clear and obvious. The building of all those schools will start this year, but you'll be able to see the complete list very shortly, as soon as the frost is out of the ground. In most places that's when the construction will start very quickly.

•(0915)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Lemay, for seven minutes.

**Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Mr. Minister, I want to thank you and your officials for joining us today. I have several questions for you. If possible, I'd appreciate it if you kept your answers brief.

I'd like to start with Vote 25c. Funds have been allocated to the Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians.

Are any discussions under way with groups that claim to be Métis, or would like to be considered as such, but have not yet been recognized? Will these funds be used to conduct the necessary studies so that talks on this subject can be initiated?

[*English*]

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** I'll just let the officials look up the actual numbers.

I can tell you what we're doing on the Métis front in a general sense. We signed last fall the Métis Nation protocol with the Métis National Council, and in that protocol is a list of activities that we've agreed together we're going to pursue. They involve everything from benefits for Métis veterans to an engagement process with the provincial governments, for example, to engage the provincial governments in a more formal way, and a list of issues that we've agreed are important. They've had contract work over the last year or two, and one of the things they're doing is they're concentrating on identifying Métis people within the settlement areas and elsewhere, people who have self-identified as Métis, to put together a list of people and expand that list so we have as good an idea as possible of how many people are Métis and inform them of their rights and what we're doing with that protocol in other ways.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** That's all correct. The \$900,000 is specifically for the Métis part of our work on consultation and accommodation, which involves all aboriginal peoples, first nation, Métis, and Inuit. So this is the Métis part of that consultation process.

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** And those who are seeking to be recognized. So then, discussions are under way.

[English]

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** It's a debate.

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** Vote L30c concerns loans to native claimants.

Mr. Minister, you have been sent a letter about this matter, but I would understand if you had not yet received it, because it only arrived at my office yesterday. The letter concerns the Wendake Huron Nation, which is located near Quebec City. A year ago, members of this nation requested some funding under this native claimants loans program, in accordance with the conditions approved by the Governor in Council.

Can they expect to receive an answer of some kind in the coming days? They have already been waiting a year.

[English]

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** We'll try to get the answer here while we're at the table, but we will get an answer for you on that.

The Wendake First Nation has been a very successful first nation in business development and economic development. They've done some good work, and I've been able to be there for some of their celebrations and announcements. I don't have an answer specifically on this and whether it relates to item 30, but we'll find that.

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** I understand. I was unable to submit my questions earlier. You will be receiving a letter about the Wendake Huron Nation.

Regarding Vote 45 that has to do with the First Nations Statistical Institute, I'd like to know if we can expect to see any results in the next year. The committee heard from representatives of the Institute several weeks ago. I note that \$4.3 million have already been paid out and the only obvious result is that some staff has been hired.

●(0920)

[English]

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** Of course, this is new. The statistical institute is only this year up and fully functioning. The board is fully staffed now. We've had negotiations with them on the budget they needed in order to run the statistical institute. They've submitted both a business plan and a plans and priorities document with us. As I said, the board is now fully staffed and they have a work plan that we expect them to keep to, and this budget is part of those negotiations that will help them complete the work plan. This was the start-up year, so you're right, you haven't seen a lot of glossy reports, because this is a new board, a new function, and they're now just up and running.

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** In the column "Vote 10"—and I'm not sure what your answer will be—the following is noted, and I quote: "Incremental funding to address health and safety pressures for First Nations communities".

Can someone tell me what these pressures might be? What exactly will this funding be used for? Are any protests expected? How much money are we talking about? The reference is on page 105 of the French version, under Vote 10. It's the second item, namely "Incremental funding to address health and safety pressures for First Nations communities". Funding for this purpose will total \$26,377,000.

[English]

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** I had it at \$26.4 million. That was to meet federal obligations in cases of floods, fire, emergency evacuation. For example, when we had to bring some of the people out of the James Bay area and evacuate them, that money was from that allocation.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lemay and Mr. Minister.

We will now hear from Ms. Crowder.

[English]

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

Thank you, Mr. Minister and departmental officials, for coming.

In your speech you touched on two things I want to ask questions on. Regarding page 83, items included in the supplementary estimates, I specifically want to talk about the provincial education and maintenance of personal care homes. I'll ask both of my questions and then let you take the time to respond to them.

The first one has to do with the personal care homes on reserve. This is not my question, it's just a statement. The Oneida Nation of the Thames has a licence to build a long-term-care facility, but they're having trouble finding capital money now. We're hopeful that under the infrastructure funds that are announced for the next fiscal year that may be possible. But once the facility is built, they will need an operating grant, and you're specifically referencing the operating grants in your speech and in the supplementary estimates. I wonder if INAC will be able to help pay for preferred funding for elders who were not eligible for CPP prior to the seventies. I think that's going to be an issue for a number of the personal care homes. I don't know if part of this money that's being transferred is part of that kind of thing.

The second piece is around education. I went back to the performance report ending March 31, 2008, and that report references the tripartite agreement with British Columbia and the fact that it has come into effect. Then in the report on plans and priorities, once again the B.C. tripartite education agreement was referenced, and in the supplementary estimates it talks about those transfers of provincial tuition dollars.

I have two questions under education. First, could you give us an update on the status of the B.C. tripartite agreement? It is a thread throughout these documents, yet I understand that as yet the full funding arrangement hasn't been put in place, and part of the sticking point is the provincial funding.

Second, when you appeared at the committee before, you talked about the new education funding being proposal driven. My understanding is that there is a small line on those proposals that requires provincial sign-off. I wonder, in the context of signing tripartite agreements—and I think a number have either been signed or are under way that would involve first nations control of education—why you would continue to require provincial sign-off.

Those are my three questions. Thank you.

• (0925)

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** Thank you. They are both good questions.

Typically, on long-term-care facilities—and the Oneida Nation is one example, but they're here and there across the country—what we've done in times past where infrastructure or investments have been made is try to bring them up to a certain provincial standard. When they reach that certain standard then the provincial governments typically kick in with funding to help with some of the operation and maintenance to do that part of it. Of course it's important to reach that standard. If it's an elders lodge—some of them might have different names across the country—if it doesn't meet that provincial standard, then typically first nations find it very difficult to maintain out of their own operating budget, because they just don't get any provincial assistance and they don't meet that standard. So they're in a catch-22.

We can get you some specific information on the Oneida application. My understanding is that they're going to be applying, I believe in this next fiscal year, for funding. I'm not sure. Sometimes when they put in an application we either don't have the money to do upgrades or there are some other i's to dot and t's to cross in order to get that funding. My understanding is that they'll be reapplying for fiscal year 2009-10, and that will go into the infrastructure list of the

many demands that are on us across the country. We'll just have to look at that when that application comes in.

Your question was on our position on long-term-care facilities, and that's how we do it, typically.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Sorry, Mr. Minister, it was actually to do with the preferred funding for elders who are not eligible for CPP. Many of the elders don't get CPP, so they don't have that kind of pension income. So there is a preferred funding for elders—it is my understanding—that helps pay for elders who are on reserve in long-term-care homes. I just wondered if that was going to be available.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** It's not part of this package.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Okay, so that money they talk about in terms of the maintenance of personal care homes isn't actually attached to specific—

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** That was just an opportunity to provide some top-up funding to six homes in the Manitoba region—about 184 beds. It was just some useful maintenance money. The issue you're raising is a more long-term income support kind of thing, which we'll try to follow up with.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Great, thanks.

And on the B.C. education...?

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** About a month ago, when I was last in B.C., I met with representatives of the aboriginal communities that are part of the FNESC system. They raised the problem of the provincial sign-off. Of course it was originally designed as an attempt to ensure, on the objectives of the FNESC agreement—or any of our other tripartite agreements across the country—that everybody was aware of what everyone else was doing, so to speak. When you get provincial sign-off, the intention was to make sure that the province is informed of what the first nation is doing, and vice versa.

You're quite accurate. In B.C.'s case they made the argument that they had provincial support on this—the province is onside and they're well aware of what's going on—but because they have this FNESC agreement, they shouldn't have to go to the province and get them to literally sign on the dotted line. So I've asked officials to follow up on that front. What I think they had or what they were willing to get was just a letter from the provincial government saying that they supported the initiative, that they were aware of it and were behind it. In other words, it was a comfort letter, if you will, rather than actually signing on the dotted line.

It was a point of principle with the first nations, not an attempt to get around the intention of that signature, which was to make sure everybody's in the loop. It was simply them saying if we have legislation, we're a stand-alone in administering this, and we shouldn't have to go cap in hand to the province and get them to sign off before it becomes legitimate. In other words, they're looking for another way to get that approval, and I told them we would investigate that. I think it's possible.

• (0930)

**The Chair:** Great. Thank you, Ms. Crowder.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** And funding...?

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** The funding issue is still being negotiated, although I think we had a good meeting the other day and we're looking at some creative ways to address some of the issues they raised with me. The signature thing is just a case in point. I think there are other ways to address their needs.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister and Ms. Crowder.

Now we're going to go to Mr. Duncan for seven minutes.

**Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Good morning, Minister, and Mr. Wernick, Mr. Yeates, and Mr. Quinn.

Minister, the committee is scheduled to deal with Bill C-5 legislation, the Indian Oil and Gas Act amendments, clause by clause. I wonder if you could remind us of the process used in developing this piece of legislation. And could you tell us the possible ramifications if the committee proceeds with amendments that will change the bill currently before us?

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** Thank you.

Obviously, Bill C-5 was the purpose of my last visit here, and I mentioned it in my opening remarks. It's an important bill. It was a long time being developed. It's an important bill, because I think in economic times like these we have to give maximum opportunities to first nations to benefit from the oil and gas reserves and the potential on their land.

This is an important and timely bill, and again, that's why I mentioned it in my remarks. The whole consultation, of course, precedes our government by several years. The previous Liberal government set up a consultative process—it has been going on now for eight or nine years—to try to update a piece of 35-year-old legislation. So it's not a partisan bill. It's not something we initiated, even. It is something, though, that we see the value of, because it's going to give economic opportunities to first nations.

There have been really intensive consultations over the last 18 months or so with the Indian Resource Council and with the 130 first nations they represent. There has been a real effort, on all fronts, I think, to make sure that we find that path forward that modernizes the regulations but also gives voice to the concerns of the Resource Council and the first nations. I have met with the IRC. I also gave them a letter—I think you have a copy—with the promise to work with them closely on the development of regulations that flow from it.

This has been going on for years and years. There are 130 first nations. There are the interests of the federal government and others. What we have is a good package of amendments to the bill that will do everything, I think, the IRC is looking for. I think that was their testimony before you. And we have an agreement to work on some of the other things that will be necessary going forward, including development of the regulations. You know, a lot of times, the devil is in the details, and the details are regulatory, so we're going to work closely with them. Also, there are some other things on their list of issues to deal with. There's an ongoing process to deal with those, as well.

As to the bill itself, I would urge the committee to consider the testimony of the IRC. What they have done, and my hat's off to them, is find a path forward with this bill that is a good path forward for the 130 first nations. If it is changed significantly, if there are amendments that change it significantly, certainly I'll have to go back to cabinet. I don't know what the amendments might be, but I would have to go back to cabinet. And my guess is that the IRC would have to go back and start a consultative process. My worry is that it's not simply a matter of going to the IRC and saying "what do you say", and somebody stamping it. We have to get consensus from 130 first nations. So away we go again.

My concern is that if it's away we go again, we'll be back here a year or two or eight from now saying that it was too bad we couldn't have fixed it back then. And that would be a shame. I think we have to grab this thing while the grabbing's good. It's not because we couldn't do more work on it; it's just that the process is not simple. The process will start another round of consultations that will be expensive, and worse yet, will mean that the current system is in place until such time as we get another consensus. So I would urge the committee to consider the testimony of the IRC, which I think has done yeoman's work in hammering out that consensus and getting a pretty good piece of legislation with an agreement by the government that they'll consider other options, moving forward, that address some of their other needs.

• (0935)

**Mr. John Duncan:** Thank you, Minister.

How much time do I have?

**The Chair:** You have two minutes.

**Mr. John Duncan:** Another piece of legislation we've tabled is of course the matrimonial real property act. I'm pleased to see that we've done this. Of course we're reminded of it because we just had International Women's Day this past Sunday. It's a long-standing issue. I remember pursuing it at this committee in the mid-nineties, so I'm glad to see that the government has done something very important here. It's especially important for aboriginal women. International and local reports all say that we need to do a better job in this area. I wonder if you can tell this committee why this bill is so important and how it will assist aboriginal women.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** Okay. It's another bill that's come about after a lot of consultation. Millions of dollars have been spent on consultation over the last number of years in a genuine effort to try to find that balance between making sure that we look after the rights of first nations to develop their own laws, and the rights of first nations women especially, or of families, we can say, to have access to some recourse. Again, this bill is an effort to try to find that balance.

My hope is that we can get it debated in the House, as we did in the last Parliament, and quickly get it into committee. I know there's work the committee wants to do on it, but I think the principle is sound. If the vote on second reading is an agreement in principle, my hope is that we can agree in principle that this is something we need to pursue.



Again, I realize that in committee there'll be many witnesses you need to talk to and so on, but the issue I would urge people to consider.... Just like the change in the last Parliament, when we finally got the changes to the Canadian Human Rights Act to make sure it now applies on reserve, that was a 30-year process, and in the end, after a lot of debate, it was the right thing to do. I thank all parties for eventually putting that through the House.

My hope is that the MRP will be the same. Let's debate it in the House and get it to committee. I think you folks could do excellent work in fleshing it out and making sure that we get the right kind of hearing for it.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Duncan and Mr. Minister.

[English]

Now we're going to proceed to the second round. We'll get in as many questions as we can.

We'll begin with Monsieur Bélanger.

[Translation]

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

[English]

I have a series of questions. On the first one, I gather we got answers this morning to questions I'd asked on the supplementary estimates B. Perhaps we'll have quicker responses because they haven't been distributed yet, so I can't come back and ask questions.

On the Bs as well, I had asked, when Mr. Yeates last appeared, Minister, if he would send to the committee the criteria upon which the recommendations were being made for construction of new schools, and the recommendations themselves. He said he'd have to verify internally. I believe that since we have the minister and the deputy here, it couldn't be any higher internally, so will we get an answer now?

• (0940)

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** I can tell you.... By all means, we'll get you those criteria. I thought I signed off on that.

**A voice:** They're on the website, actually.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** They're on the website.

On the criteria, there's a national ranking framework for schools. It lists the four priorities in the department's national priority ranking framework. There's a website that can give you that, but it starts with health and safety issues as the number one priority, and then there's a series: preserving the integrity of the infrastructure, making sure that it extends the life—

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** We'll look at them. We're short on time. But we'll get them?

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** Yes. They're on the website, but you will get them.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Thank you.

Will we get the recommendations as well?

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** We'll get the recommendations. As was asked about earlier by Mr. Russell, we haven't announced it. The only reason you don't have the list of the ten and the three.... I don't think it's going to change a bit, but what we have to do before we publicly announce them is go to those first nations and make sure they are ready for the facilities. We have to work with them to make sure. I don't just announce them arbitrarily.

They are ready. In my opinion, they are all going to be announced in the next two or three weeks, but I'm reluctant to just put a list down in Ottawa here and then find out that the first nations say there's a problem, that the design changed or there's a problem they needed to talk to me about. I don't think that's going to happen, so it should be available in the next two or three weeks.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Thank you.

In the supplementary estimates C, there's additional education billing for re-profiling and transfers. Is this something that will be ongoing? I want to make sure. The fact that you're coming at the end of the year with Cs would indicate that something has changed during the year. So what has changed during the year? Is it extra billing? Is it more students? Is it going to be an ongoing thing?

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** This is the vote transfer, Mr. Bélanger. What happens, as you probably know, is that we have a large vote for grants and contributions and we have a vote for the operating of the department. We've managed the operating vote very tightly and very carefully with the help of the chief financial officer. We realized about two-thirds of the way into the year that we weren't going to need all of the operating vote, so we've been able to move it into the grants and contributions vote and are able to do more things than we would have been able to do otherwise. If we hadn't done the vote transfer, the money would have lapsed.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** That's not my question. If it's being transferred, is it because you need to cover more of the provincial costs of education?

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** It's essentially a waiting list system. We can do more this year than we would have otherwise done. We just work our way down lists and lists. So by freeing up some of the operating money, we were able to do more with the grants vote this year.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** I think the question you had, though, is whether this is a permanent part of the budget.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Yes, that's part of the question. But we're talking about fiscal 2008-09, which ends in three weeks. So what more will you be doing in three weeks?

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** That money is essentially being spent because we knew by September or October we could move it from operating to grants and contributions.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** So this is a retroactive application.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** That's right. That's what the minister explained in his opening remarks, that we knew we would not need all this money, so we moved it out through the grants and contributions thing and this is the reporting to Parliament of that. So we're asking for the vote transfer from the operating vote to the G and C vote.

If we can squeeze any money out of the operating vote during the year to spend on the programming, we do that.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** My colleague wanted some time too, and I'm a little.... What if Parliament said no—what happens then?

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** If you refuse the vote transfer?

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Yes.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** Then we'd be short of grants and contributions money, and I'd have to start cancelling things for the last three weeks of the year, to make sure we didn't exceed the ceiling, which is \$5.2-something billion.

● (0945)

**The Chair:** Okay, we'll try to get back to that. Thank you, Monsieur Bélanger.

Now we'll go to Mr. Albrecht, for five minutes.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister and witnesses, for being here today.

The north and the development of the Arctic has certainly been one of the priorities of our government. The Prime Minister has visited a number of times, and I know, Minister, you have as well. And last summer a number of our committee members had the opportunity to visit Iqaluit, as an example.

I'd like to follow up on two questions. One is regarding Arctic research. I noticed a slight adjustment in these votes because of a delay. Could you outline some of the research activities our government is engaged in in the north?

And secondly, the one large reallocation is related to fuel costs. Those of us who visited the north also were very much aware of the fact that the fuel has to be purchased within a very small window, and because of that, sometimes the northern communities are forced to purchase their fuel at very high cost. I'm wondering if any current research is applied to possible alternative energy sources, whether that be geothermal, wind, gasification, or these kinds of things. Could you first talk about the research in general and then possibly the question of energy supply?

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** Thank you.

You're right that the north is important to the government. The Prime Minister seems to have a real love for it, and enjoys his trips there. He always speaks glowingly of them. Of course I've enjoyed my travels up north, as have many of you. It's an exciting area and there's a lot of potential right across the north. It's a very wonderful place, and I encourage people to visit there. It's a unique tourist opportunity within our own country and a wonderful place to go. You can pick your area. It comprises 40% of Canada, so there's a lot to see and enjoy.

I was in Iqaluit a couple of weeks ago and we announced, from budget 2009, the request for proposals on the \$85 million that we're going to put into existing research facilities. We announced it quickly following the budget announcements here. We hope to have those requests for proposals in very shortly, in the first week or so of April, and make those announcements in time for the building season coming up. That \$85 million will be spent over the next two years on existing facilities. It's not to build something new or grandiose, but to help northern-based universities and some southern universities that have research facilities across the north. The \$85 million was very well received when we made that announcement.

In addition, we announced the request for \$2 million to help design and locate the permanent world-class research facility in the north. This will be a new facility. We've also announced a short list of locations for that permanent facility. It will be in either Cambridge Bay, Pond Inlet, or Resolute—in the northwest passage area. The announcement of the \$2 million will help us get world-class advice on everything from what it should look like and how it's going to integrate with local community and Inuit knowledge, to how we can maximize the benefits to northerners and the world, because this is going to be an international facility. So that's off and going.

We've continued to make investments in the international polar year, which is our flagship. We've invested more in that than any other country in the world in the science and research on everything from climate change to adaptation issues.

You asked how we handle the changing environment up there. It involves everything from technology to human adaptation, building techniques, migration patterns of wildlife, hunting methods, storage, etc. There have been studies on a lot of that, and it has to do with adaptation and how it affects the people who live in the north. There has been an important human dimension to the research side that I think is going to pay dividends down the road.

You asked another couple of questions on fuel costs.

● (0950)

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Minister.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** You're right about the fuel costs. Quite often the fuel for these remote communities is barged in. You get one chance a year, so whatever the price is, that's what you pay in the summertime. Last summer the price of oil was \$150 a barrel, so the price of diesel was through the roof.

Unfortunately for many of those communities, that's when they had to fill up. Whether it was barged in, boated in, or whatever, they paid through the nose. Some of those communities simply didn't have the money to pay all the bills. It was almost a one-time expense because of the blip in the price of diesel. There is an allocation of money in the supplementary estimates C specifically to help out some of those communities. It's a significant investment, but there's really no alternative, because it's through no fault of their own. People are at the vagaries of the international marketplace. Let's hope the price to refuel will be lower.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

We will now go to Mr. Lévesque, for five minutes.

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

Good, Minister.

You state on page 4 of your notes that \$10 million has been added to the Food Mail Program. I recall that a pilot project had been launched when your predecessor, Mr. Prentice, was in office. We had asked that the pilot project be extended to all communities because a large quantity of perishable goods were being lost as a result of the Food Mail Program. The pilot project improved the level of service to communities. Approximately \$60 million was allocated in order to provide service to all communities. Have you continued to examine this option?

I will ask you all of my questions in succession. Since you enjoy talking, you'll have an opportunity to do so after.

In Vote 10, in light of the delays in planned amendments to the Cree-Naskapi of Quebec Act, a little more than \$92 million has been budgeted. Has a portion of this \$92 million been earmarked pursuant to the James Bay Cree agreement? If so, what level of funding are we talking about? In the case of the Naskapi, would this payment be conditional on the passage of the Act to amend the Cree-Naskapi of Quebec Act? As we know, talks are currently under way with the Inuit within the framework of the Naskapi land claims. Will this affect the process in some way?

I don't want to take up too much of your time, so I will ask you to answer my questions.

[English]

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** Okay, thank you.

[Translation]

Congratulations, Mr. Lévesque.

[English]

I know it's your birthday today. You're looking in fine form. Your questions, as always, are very perceptive. So we'll wish you a happy birthday and proceed with this.

The pilot projects were part of what helped to inform our ongoing study on the food mail program, and I think there's been a call for even more investigation as to alternatives. There's a lot of unhappiness with the food mail program; people are saying that it's just not getting the job done, or there's too much spoilage and it's

not an efficient way to deliver food. So we continue to look at options, including the pilot projects, for one. And we've been asked to expand pilot projects to look at some other options as well. But in the meantime, we feel that we have to fund it, because it's a well-used program and it least keeps the cost of food reasonable in the meantime. So this \$10 million will help us do that. Part of what we're doing are these pilot projects that are informing our research and our decision-making as we move forward.

I should just point out that last week, when I was in Montreal, we announced the money for the runway extension at Puvirmituq airport, up in James Bay, so that the airport will be able to accept a 737 by fall—hopefully by December. They had made the point there that if we could get that runway extended, people were prepared to build lockers, storage facilities, and food-handling facilities to get cheaper and better-quality food there. So that was a welcome announcement. It shows us how sometimes, even with food mail, it's not just the program, but the facilities, the transportation links, and a bunch of things that will make food affordable in relatively isolated areas. That sort of infrastructure is a valuable part of making food and health care and other things available in a cost-effective and timely way.

I'll let the deputy minister speak to the Cree-Naskapi agreement, but it is important that we do proceed with the amendments to that agreement. As you say, there are ongoing discussions. I think these are all going well, but it will be important, eventually, to get that legislation approved to give us the legislative authority necessary to proceed with that.

On the actual amount, Mr. Wernick will continue.

• (0955)

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** I apologize to the minister for my handwriting.

It's a progress payment under the agreement that was reached in 2007. They will get the money when the amendments to the Cree-Naskapi Act go through; and we expect to have that bill in front of this committee this spring.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you. On behalf of the committee, happy birthday, Mr. Lévesque.

**Mr. Yvon Lévesque:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Finally, we'll go to Mr. Rickford for five minutes.

**Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister and your staff, for coming here today.

I want to revisit the discussion around schools and just make a couple of points in advance of my question.

First of all, I think there's been a fairly overall positive review of our commitment to education for first nations people. I think when the Caledon Institute of Social Policy states that this economic plan is an impressive commitment to aboriginal peoples, we're certainly winning some people over.

Certainly I've heard from grand chiefs in my riding that this economic action plan is focused on a variety of educational activities that include skills and apprenticeship training. And there's the untold good news, like the very recent increases in program funding for maternal child health and early childhood programs—a particular passion of mine. We're seeing some communities move towards licensed day care facilities, which are really the building blocks and determinants of success in school. It is clear that we're moving forward in the right direction and making some important progress around some of those aspects, including now schools, that kindergarten to grade 12 piece, which is essential.

Mr. Minister, and certainly Mr. Wernick, perhaps you could comment on how the government will be deciding to build new schools moving forward. I know you were about to touch on that earlier, and I want to hear it for the record today.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** Thank you.

I think it is important, obviously not just because there's much infrastructure needed out there, but because it also sends a message of hope to many more communities. We spend \$230 million, \$240 million a year on infrastructure in a general, ongoing way, but certainly this announcement is going to allow us to build those ten new schools and the three major renovations that are going to take a little bit of the pressure off in the system. There's lots of work to do, we all know that.

I just want to back you up on some of your earlier comments about early childhood interventions. A lot of that is from Health Canada's side, but I think you're on to a good track, and I encourage you. I know your expertise in this area as a long-time health worker, but certainly it's important. The money we allocated in this budget will allow us to add another couple of provinces to the child and family arrangements that we have already in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia. All of that is changing from an intervention model to a prevention model, and the prevention model is what the rest of the world, if you will, has gone to in recent years. So it's long overdue, and that will help in educational outcomes; it's one of those investments that's going to really pay dividends.

What we have in school construction is priority-based. As I mentioned, it's on the website, so it's no secret. There's a national priority-ranking framework. That framework is designed that way so it really takes the political guesswork out of it. I don't interfere in that at all. I just ask that my deputy and the regional staff do their work on analyzing needs based on a set of criteria that are objective. They're not politically driven. I don't intervene or interfere. As you saw in some of the newspaper reports here a couple of weeks ago, I'm defensive on behalf of many civil servants who say “No minister ever instructed me, nor would I accept such instructions.”

It's important for first nations and aboriginal people to know that there's not political interference. It's based on a priority list that's developed objectively, then that list is given to me, and I've not changed it one iota. I've not changed one school, I've not changed

one priority. It was given to me, it was put into the budgetary process, and that's how it will be approved. I think it is important for first nations to know that, because accusations otherwise, I think, smear the professional civil servants who are doing their job of analyzing this properly—in a very difficult situation with multiple needs. They're doing the best they can to rank those systems, and I'm doing the best we can to deliver on them.

• (1000)

**The Chair:** Okay, and that's just on time, Mr. Minister.

We're going to suspend here for about five minutes, but before we do that, I'd like to take the opportunity to also thank the members of your delegation here this morning, the deputy minister, CFO, and Mr. Yeates, the assistant deputy. Thank you again for your comments and advice this morning. We'll take that in hand.

Again, thank you, Minister, for taking the time to join our committee this morning.

Members, we'll suspend for five minutes. Thank you.

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\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

•

• (1010)

**The Chair:** Thank you, members.

As you know, our orders of the day were to continue at this point with clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-5. I know there have been discussions among members, and I wonder at this point whether members would be prepared to speak to a potential change in that order of the day.

Mr. Russell.

**Mr. Todd Russell:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to speak to changing the orders of the day.

I do appreciate that we invited a number of people to be witnesses here today, with a view to going clause by clause and them offering their expertise.

**The Chair:** Excuse me, Mr. Russell. I don't mean to interrupt you, but I should maybe consult with members.

Does the committee wish to continue having the meeting televised at this point in time? Is there a consensus for that?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Please carry on.

**Mr. Todd Russell:** I think all committee members are aware that we have had some correspondence from the Stoney Nakoda First Nation with respect to the bill before us. Things seem to be a bit late coming to us in terms of some of the concerns that were raised. Notwithstanding that, the Stoney Nakoda has done some very intensive work around Bill C-5. They present some critiques we haven't heard at the committee, and I believe we should afford them the opportunity to present that to committee on Thursday. Their representatives have indicated the chiefs of the Stoney Nakoda can appear on Thursday.

So I would recommend that we suspend clause-by-clause for now, hear from the Stoney Nakoda on Thursday during the first hour, and then move on with clause-by-clause after that. That will also give us the time to review the information they have brought forward.

Having said that, I'd also like to reiterate that, as a party, we are basically supportive of Bill C-5 and we want to move this through the process. For the record, I've also indicated we are not interested in rewriting this bill. But we are interested in hearing logical arguments and critiques that may have some influence on potential amendments we might want to bring forward.

I would recommend that we go forward in this particular fashion.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Russell.

Ms. Crowder.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** I would also support that we suspend clause-by-clause today and hear from the Stoney Nakoda on Thursday. They've presented us with a substantial amount of additional information that would indicate they have been at the table for a number of years raising concerns that were not addressed with the bill. I think it's important that we do hear from them.

Would we change what we're going to do for the next hour?

**The Chair:** Yes, Ms. Crowder. If the committee is in agreement with this direction, then we'll have to consider where we go from there. We'll listen to speakers on this particular point and then decide from there.

Mr. Duncan.

**Mr. John Duncan:** Mr. Lemay is before me.

**The Chair:** Oh, pardon me. Yes, you're right.

Monsieur Lemay.

[*Translation*]

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

I have to say that I'm having a bit of a hard time with this. Obviously, I agree with my colleagues Mr. Russell and Ms. Crowder. When the committee meets, it has an obligation to respect the wishes of First Nations. The Stoney Nakoda First Nation has asked to meet with us. Members of this First Nation have sent us some fairly technical draft amendments in English only. We informed them that these amendments could not be tabled unless they were translated.

Could we possibly ask officials with the Indian Oil and Gas Commission to examine the draft amendments? If we receive these amendments and they are tabled in both official languages—something they intend to do—then we'll need to delay the clause-by-clause study phase. There are 12 pages of amendments in all, a not insignificant number. Their lawyer contacted us in the past several hours. Since we know they plan to table these draft amendments, can we at least prepare ourselves in advance for this moment? Can we ask Mr. Crowfoot, Mr. Jacques and Mr. Dempsey to take a look at these amendments and get back to us with some answers on Thursday?

• (1015)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** That certainly seems reasonable, Mr. Lemay. I don't want to jump the gun here. If we go forward with this, we'll have to wait to hear the testimony of the witness, and the committee will determine from there if further work is needed.

Were you suggesting that we hear from officials today on that question?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** Mr. Chair, it's no simple matter asking officials to come and give testimony. I don't know what they will tell us. Judging from what the lawyer for Rae and Company has told us, these individuals plan to come and table some amendments. I think we need to prepare ourselves for that day. I don't know if any of you have read the questions from members of the Stoney Nakoda reserves, but I personally don't know what answer to give them as far as the amendments are concerned.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay.

We're going to go to Mr. Duncan and then Monsieur Bélanger.

**Mr. John Duncan:** If we had to summarize our position, I guess it would be that we're okay with Thursday for the Stoney Nakoda chiefs. I believe we should hear from them before we hear from the department officials. For the rest of this meeting, I think we should talk about future business. Assuming that we're successful Thursday, we'll need a subject for next week and ongoing meetings.

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

Monsieur Bélanger.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Mr. Chair, I just want to clarify something. I agree with the idea of hearing from the witnesses on Thursday. I'm wondering if it might not be wise to postpone our clause-by-clause study of the bill until the following meeting. I'm not saying that amendments should be suggested, but if that's the case, we'll have some time to address them.

Furthermore, it would give the department and the council time to react to the testimony. That way, on the Tuesday after the break week, we would have everything we need—whether from the department, the council or our own research offices—to proceed with the clause-by-clause study of the bill, including consideration of the amendments, if necessary. We would have time to prepare ourselves and to give notice of the proposed amendments. By allowing us this wiggle room, we would have ample time to prepare properly for this phase of our work and we would thus be able, in my estimation, to dispense fairly quickly with our study of the bill.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** That was going to be my next question.

We may want to consider what the second hour could be used for on Thursday if it would be advisable at that point. If, under your suggestion, we move clause-by-clause to the Tuesday after the break, we may want to use that session to dispose of outstanding questions and then be prepared to go to clause-by-clause on the following Tuesday.

• (1020)

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Or perhaps, Mr. Chairman, we could use more than an hour with the witnesses, depending on the nature of the discussions we have at that time.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Bagnell.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** I'm sort of following up on that.

First of all, I agree with what Mr. Duncan said. Hopefully, we can talk about future business today when we finish this. It would follow what Mr. Lemay and Mr. Bélanger said if we spent the first hour on Thursday hearing the witnesses and asking questions. In the second hour we could get the officials' response to those issues, as Mr. Lemay was saying. We already have it in writing, and I'm sure the department has it in writing. As Mr. Lemay said, some of it is pretty technical. Maybe the officials could give us some technical ramifications of the amendments that have been proposed for us to think about over the constituency week.

**The Chair:** We're talking in terms of having officials available in the latter part of that two hours on Thursday. To Mr. Lemay's point, would you also wish to have representatives of the IOGC, the regulator, in attendance for that?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** The answer is yes, Mr. Chair. I would even go a little further. The document in question has been made public, in that these individuals sent it to us. Admittedly, it has not been translated into French and therefore cannot be tabled to the committee, but the fact remains that all committee members have received it. I suggest that departmental officials familiarize themselves with it, so that they are ready on Thursday to answer questions. I'm a lawyer, but I admit that I'm finding it very difficult to understand all of the ramifications of the proposed amendments.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Monsieur Lemay.

Mr. Albrecht.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Mr. Chair, it appears the committee has pretty well decided which direction to go, but I want to be on record as being disappointed that we're heading in this direction.

Our minister indicated this morning that the process has been ongoing for eight to ten years. This bill is identical to the one that was introduced in the last session. The Indian Resource Council has done significant consultation with all 130 groups that are represented. My concern is that we're setting a dangerous precedent. If we're going to open this up to one community, what is going to stop another community from coming to us at the eleventh hour—and we're at the eleventh hour now, at 11:30—and asking for consideration?

I think we have to realize that the bill isn't perfect, but the Indian Resource Council and the government have come to an agreement and this is their proposal. My concern is that we run the risk of delaying this further and, as I said earlier, of setting a dangerous precedent when a group that has been charged with the consultation process has come to us indicating support for it, but now we're going back and opening up that discussion again.

So I'm prepared to go with the committee's decision, but personally I think it's the wrong direction.

**The Chair:** Monsieur Lemay.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** Most likely I would agree with Mr. Albrecht if the first nations that have asked to be heard were more or less concerned by this bill. As it happens, I've learned that the Stoney Nakoda reserve is located in close proximity to Calgary, an area with major gas and oil development potential. Therefore, I've reversed my position. These communities are indeed directly affected by this bill. Consequently, I believe they must be heard by the committee.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Monsieur Lemay.

Ms. Crowder.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** I think it's important to recognize that the Stoney Nakoda have done a substantial amount of work over the consultation process and can demonstrate they've consistently raised concerns with the bill, both prior to Bill C-5 and prior to Bill C-63. They have the documentation. It's not that they were consulted and were in agreement. I think it's very important that they do come before the committee. Again, they have a substantial amount of documentation to support their contention that they have continuously raised issues with this piece of legislation.

• (1025)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Russell.

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

I'm not going to repeat the arguments that have been made by Ms. Crowder and Mr. Lemay. It was my understanding that there is general agreement from all sides that the Stoney Nakoda will appear in the first hour on Thursday, with officials responding to some of the written and oral arguments that are going to be made for the second hour. We would have clause-by-clause on the Tuesday after the constituency break week.

I know there are probably good arguments to be made, and I appreciate where Mr. Albrecht is coming from, but is that the sense of the committee? I think we should at least dispense with this portion of how we're going to move forward.

**The Chair:** There being no other speakers, it would appear there's consensus for that schedule, if I can call it that, just as you described, Mr. Russell.

That does take us to clause-by-clause consideration on the Tuesday following the break, which would be March 24. We will set aside that meeting in its entirety at this point in time for that consideration of Bill C-5.

I take it there are no other speakers on that. We will accept that as a consensus by the committee, to proceed in that fashion. We will call witnesses in addition to the first nation—departmental officials, including those from IOGC—in the second hour. It has not been suggested that the IRC, who has been before our committee and provided testimony already, would be here, but we will hear from the department on the very specific and, I would agree, very technical suggestions on the part of first nations.

That does leave members with the question of how we proceed at the Thursday meeting. We had originally set aside this Thursday for consideration of study topics. The idea there was that we could direct our analysts and clerk's office in respect to getting witnesses for our initial study, going into the period after the break next week.

Is it the desire of the committee to consider that issue now? We have 30-odd minutes left in today's meeting. We can discuss that.

I'll take your direction on that question.

Mr. Lemay.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** Mr. Chair, I had asked that we start preparing for the appearance of representatives of the Assembly of First Nations to discuss education. Once we have completed our study of Bill C-5, and before undertaking our study of Bill C-8, I think it would be a good idea to do that. The Assembly of First Nations has written to us on several occasions. The First Nations Steering Education Committee would like to meet with us.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Bagnell.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have just an overall comment on what we study. This is the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. I've been on this committee for years, and I don't remember ever having an agenda item, or at least not very many, on northern development.

Just as a general comment, then, I'm hoping that one of our chosen study items could be related to the north.

**The Chair:** We're actually starting to get into that discussion now.

I was really seeking from the committee whether you want to have that discussion now and set a study topic. We do have, by the way, and I think you've all had circulated to you, the preferences of members with respect to their priorities and ideas, including those just mentioned.

We will need to schedule some time to have that discussion. It would appear at this stage that we won't be able to do that before the break. That does leave us the option, if you wish, to continue with a briefing-type meeting. There were still a couple of briefing topics that we had not completely dispensed with prior to our taking up consideration of Bill C-5. We could go in that direction, if you wish.

Ms. Crowder.

•(1030)

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Do we have a list? I know that it was circulated by e-mail.

**The Chair:** It has been circulated.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Yes, but do we have a list here today?

**The Chair:** We do.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** It would be great if I could see it. I didn't bring my copy with me.

I do have a couple of points around the study. I submitted an extensive list, but I would like to speak strongly on two items.

The first one is that we continue the economic development study that we started last June. There was a motion, which the committee had accepted. I believe, in light of the conference being held in Toronto this week that's talking about business and economic development—the Assembly of First Nations and business leaders are in Toronto—there were some very interesting first nations identified as key success stories. I think part of what we had talked about was the fact that the committee would not only hear witnesses but also take the committee to some communities. This committee, in the years that I've been on it, has only gone out once.

In terms of the economic development, I think education links into that and northern development links into that. I think there's an opportunity for us to fully support an economic development study.

In addition, with regard to what Mr. Bagnell said about northern development, there's the Neil McCrank report. If nothing else, we could at least take a look at that report and have some witnesses on that report. That would start to inform us about northern issues.

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you, Ms. Crowder.

We do have to go to Mr. Duncan and then Monsieur Bélanger.

Mr. Duncan.

**Mr. John Duncan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I did notice that three of the four parties all have items on the north, from Mr. Bagnell on Arctic sovereignty, from Ms. Crowder on northern economic development, and from the Conservatives on strategic investments in northern economic development. Ms. Crowder is correct in talking about the McCrank report as being very significant in terms of northern issues as well, so I think we have fairly good consensus, although the two items submitted by Monsieur Lemay do not include the north. I think his item regarding Maniwaki might be something we could look at. That looks like a fairly focused item that would not take a lot of committee time.

I wouldn't mind some clarification from Monsieur Lemay as to what Maniwaki means. Are you talking about Kitigan Zibi, are you talking about Lac Barrière, or are you talking about something else?

That's where we have a consensus, in a sense. Thank you.

**The Chair:** We'll come to that.

We're going to go now to Monsieur Bélanger.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Two things, Mr. Chairman. First, I was listening to a radio report yesterday that there was apparently in Toronto a significant conference yesterday on the economic development of first nations. I'm just wondering why the committee was not made aware of that or perhaps even afforded an opportunity to participate. It's just a question I was wondering about. Perhaps we could obtain a report from that conference and its conclusions, if there are any.

Secondly, I'm just reminded of what we're doing here today, Mr. Chairman. I remember studying or being advised of a couple of principles that were important in human endeavours: one was the Peter Principle, that you'd be promoted to your level of incompetence; and the other one, whose name I forget, was that work would expand to occupy the time available. I wonder if that's what we're proving here today, the existence of that other principle.

I'd be willing to punt this to Thursday, after we've finished with Bill C-5.

•(1035)

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you.

[Translation]

You have the floor, Mr. Lemay.

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** I have two things to say. Firstly, in response to Mr. Bélanger's question, we did in fact receive an invitation to attend the First Nations Economic Development Conference. However, since Parliament was sitting, my whip did not give us permission to attend. There are some votes scheduled and therefore, we need to be here.

Secondly, to answer Mr. Duncan's question, I suggested that the committee visit Maniwaki because this would be an extension of our study on economic development. Few of you may remember this, but around May or June of last year, we began our study of First Nations economic development. Our first order of business was a trip to Iqaluit and to Pagnirtung. Had Parliament not suddenly been dissolved and elections called, we would have picked up and continued this study when the session resumed. Unfortunately, that was not to be. I'm suggesting we visit Maniwaki as part of our study on the economic development of First Nations.

It is critically important, to my mind, that we meet with First Nations to talk about education, which is a priority of theirs. I suggested that we visit Maniwaki, not only as part of our study on the economic development of First Nations, but also to meet with the elected Grand Chief of Maniwaki, Mr. Whiteduck, and with the Chair of the First Nations Education Steering Committee. This visit would accomplish three things all at once.

Thirdly, I agree with what Mr. Bagnell was saying. I believe the North is poised to experience incredible economic development. This is something we need to look at because any development that is undertaken should respect the wishes of First Nations, and especially of the Inuit. I'm not sure that we can turn our attention to this matter during the coming session.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Rickford please.

**Mr. Greg Rickford:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I'm disappointed we didn't get a chance to attend that conference. I found out about it last week, and I apologize to my caucus and the committee for not being aware of it. I just heard about it through the AFN. I would have assumed other people at the committee here would have heard from a similar route. It was a very important conference. My schedule didn't allow me to get to a couple of events in particular that I wanted to attend.

The second point I want to make is I share the consensus that northern economic development is probably a great direction for us to go in terms of a study. I just want to point out to the committee that we'll have to work hard at defining what we're saying when we talk about the north, because sometimes the documents seem to talk exclusively about the Arctic Circle, specifically the subarctic regions as well. My riding, for example, goes all the way up to the coast of Hudson Bay, and certainly when it comes to polar bear studies, etc., we're included in some northern development in studies in those regards. Then we have southern communities that are still quite north and very isolated, but well into the provinces. So when we start to talk about some of the other issues I was interested in, like procurement strategies and stuff for aboriginal businesses, it is a north to south and south to north kind of discussion. I just want to make it clear.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Rickford.

Ms. Crowder please.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** It seems to me if we have general agreement—I disagree with Mr. Bélanger, I don't think we're so-called ragging the puck here—I think this is an opportunity for us to provide some guidance to the analysts about where we might want to go so they can start that process. One of the things many of us have asked for in the past is if we're going to go ahead and do a study we want to know what previous reports have been done, what recommendations were made, what items were acted on, what words, and why not. So work could start tomorrow.

I fully support us looking at economic development, but I would like to see it expanded outside the north. I think it should be northern economic development and economic development throughout the country. I think in terms of framing what we would want to look at, what we would want to look at again is what works, what hasn't worked, and what supports need to be in place to support constructive results-based economic development in communities in the north and across Canada.

•(1040)

**The Chair:** That's what we're going to do. We're going to have that discussion. I think we'll have that discussion in terms of providing some scope for that work ahead of us on the Thursday following the break. We have at least three days in front of us now, with a full day on Thursday, as discussed. We have the clause-by-clause for Bill C-5 on March 24 and we will set aside March 26 for consideration of providing some clarity on our next steps in terms of study topics. There being no other speakers, I think we will proceed on that basis.

Mr. Bagnell.



**Hon. Larry Bagnell:** Just for clarification, are you now directing the researchers to start proceeding on that topic?

**The Chair:** Not yet. It would appear to me that this committee still needs to provide some scope in terms of direction. Certainly there was some general interest in proceeding along the lines of economic development topics, as members put forward, but we need to provide some boundaries and some scope for that study if in fact that's how we proceed.

We'll have that discussion on Thursday, March 26. Just to be clear, we won't schedule witnesses for that day.

If there's consensus, that's how we will proceed. *D'accord?*

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** The meeting is adjourned.

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