



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

AANO • NUMBER 023 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, June 2, 2009

Chair

Mr. Bruce Stanton

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

Tuesday, June 2, 2009

• (0900)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC)): Good morning, witnesses, guests and members of the Committee. I would like to call to order this 23rd meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

[English]

This morning we welcome the First Nations Education Council.

Members, this was a request to appear before our committee. You'll recall from our trip to Kitigan Zibi that the issue of funding for education was raised, and in fact Chief Whiteduck was kind enough to give us the presentation that the council had forwarded on their concerns and proposal.

This morning we welcome Lise Bastien, the director general of the council, and also Raymond Sioui, assistant director. Chief Conrad Polson is here this morning and joins us from the Timiskaming Community. Also, we have Chief Ghislain Picard, who is the representative of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador.

Welcome, members.

We customarily begin with approximately ten minutes, and I understand from speaking with Ms. Bastien that it may take a little bit more time than ten minutes. We do have two hours for questions from members.

We'll begin with Ms. Bastien, for ten minutes, then after your opening presentations we'll begin with questions from members.

Mr. Rickford.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Are there copies of the speeches?

The Chair: We do not have a copy of your presentation in both official languages. Therefore, they have not been circulated to all members, so we leave it to the witnesses to make that determination.

Go ahead, Ms. Bastien.

[Translation]

Ms. Lise Bastien (Director General, First Nations Education Council): Mr. Chairman, Madam Vice-Chair, Mr. Vice-Chair, honourable members, thank you very much for inviting us to appear this morning.

The First Nations Education Council is an organization which, as its name suggests, works in the educational field with 22 First

Nations communities in Quebec. We have been around now for some 24 years. Our role is to help community members improve the way they structure and manage their educational system both inside and outside the community.

This morning, the main focus of our presentation is a brief that you all received when you visited Kitigan Zibi. This report was distributed to you by Chief Gilbert Whiteduck. I would like to very briefly review it with you.

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): I have a copy of that and I've looked through it. Unfortunately, I left it in my office. Would you have an extra copy?

Ms. Lise Bastien: Yes, sure. I have two more copies of this.

The Chair: We won't take away from your time there, Ms. Bastien. We'll continue. I appreciate your indulgence there, and we'll continue.

• (0905)

[Translation]

Ms. Lise Bastien: The focus of our presentation is the chronic underfunding of education, at both the primary and secondary levels. We also talk about the funding of post-secondary education, occupational training and school construction.

In recent years, there have been numerous consultations and studies done on the subject. Following our many awareness campaigns, including a comprehensive campaign mounted by our Council regarding the chronic underfunding of education, a number of ministers or former ministers or prime ministers made statements regarding the underfunding issue and the persistent gap between the funding of First Nations education and education in the rest of the country.

That is a fact that has not only been pointed to by the First Nations; it was confirmed by former Prime Minister Martin, the former Minister of Aboriginal Affairs for Ontario, Michael Bryant, and the current Premier of Quebec, Jean Charest. All of them said that spending on First Nations education is half of what it is in other communities. The Manitoba Minister of Education also said about the same thing. There is quite a long list of people who have made similar comments.

Indeed, we are not the only ones pointing to the fact that the funding gap affecting our schools and educational systems is increasingly alarming; people from outside the community are saying the same thing. This is about educating our children and our future. The impact of this gap in terms of the resources allocated to secure the future of our young people is not something that should be taken lightly. Furthermore, this funding gap has very grave consequences for the ability of our school system to achieve results that are similar or comparable to those associated with the other systems. Indeed, the lack of funding in our communities makes it extremely difficult to provide comparable services.

We have reached the conclusion that, if nothing is done in the very near future to reduce that gap... There is a desire to integrate the First Nations into the Canadian educational system, which is not something that any nation wanting to assert its independence would consider desirable.

I would like now to turn it over to Raymond Sioui to give you a quick overview of the brief.

Mr. Raymond Sioui (Assistant Director, First Nations Education Council): I will be brief. The FNEC paper is not our first analysis of this issue. In a sense, it is a summary of all of the many analyses we have done with respect to our funding. The brief is divided into four sections and provides an analysis of the national situation as well as one for the province of Quebec.

The first section deals with the funding of primary and secondary schools. That section talks about the underfunding of education, which is primarily due to a completely outdated funding formula. That formula was developed in 1988 and has never been reviewed since. It is a formula that allocates funding to certain items that are completely underfunded and for which only paltry amounts are provided.

For example, as regards language instruction, the amounts allocated are laughable. This is also a formula that ignores a number of different costs. There have been developments in the provinces which were never included in the formula, such as costs for operating libraries, introducing new technologies, occupational training—particularly in Quebec, which is given at the secondary level—sports and recreation. It is also a formula which, since 1996, has not been indexed to the cost of living nor considered population increases. Of course, that has resulted in a loss of value which is huge in constant dollars, something we point out in the brief.

There is another section dealing with the funding of educational systems. In general, educational systems comprise three separate levels. The first is the schools. The second is the school boards—they may have different names, depending on the provinces. And, the third level is the departments.

However, for the First Nations, the only funding officially available is the funding allocated for First Nations schools. There has never been any officially recognized funding provided to regional organizations such as the FNEC. This is a significant problem in terms of our ability to provide support services to our schools that are comparable to those available in other schools in Canada.

The third section deals with the funding of post-secondary education. Your Committee produced a report on that saying that the

highest priority is post-secondary education for First Nations people in Canada. Indeed, we would like to thank the Committee for that report. It clearly documents the underfunding of students. Primarily because of that underfunding, waiting lists have gotten longer over the years. Today, there are more than 10,500 students on waiting lists. There is also the problem of underfunding of post-secondary institutions. The report mentions that these institutions are nevertheless somewhat successful and have greatly increased their graduation rate, even though underfunding puts them in a precarious position.

Finally, the fourth section presents recommendations regarding underfunding and talks about the need for a funding framework for First Nations education that reflects true cost factors.

I would also like to mention the other work being carried out by the FNEC. Last week, I sent out a study carried out in 2005 on the costs of primary and secondary education. I would particularly like to talk about the work we have been doing over the last two years to develop a funding formula.

The Department of Indian and Northern Affairs had promised to update the funding formula. That was mentioned in the 2005-2006 Reports on Plans and Priorities prepared at headquarters, which was intending to develop an adequate financing mechanism. It was also part of the strategic planning exercise at the regional office between 2005 and 2008, and the latter was expected to contribute to the development of a new funding formula, even though that never happened.

About five years ago, a national joint group composed of representatives of the Assembly of First Nations and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs was struck to review the funding formula. Unfortunately, its own funding was cut back or cancelled before it could complete its work. Its task was to review the formula, after conducting cost studies. In addition, the funding formula and authorizations were supposed to be renewed in April of 2008. However, there was no review, and the status quo was imposed.

●(0910)

The FNEC truly believes that school funding should be determined on the basis of an adequate funding formula which reflects all costs. In that regard, we share the concern of the Auditor General who stated in her 2004 Report: « The Department does not know whether funding to First Nations is sufficient to meet the education standards it has set and whether the results achieved are in line with the resources provided ».

There are also a number of independent researchers, including Mr. Mendelson of the Caledon Institute, who said that the recognition of First Nations' jurisdiction over education requires a funding mechanism based on a clearly defined process and principles that are not subject to arbitrary or unilateral decisions by the federal government.

Ms. Lise Bastien: Thank you, Raymond.

I would now like to ask Chef Conrad Polson to briefly review with you the actual impact of this on his community and what it means for current education management regimes.

[English]

Chief Conrad Polson (Timiskaming Community, First Nations Education Council): Good morning. My name's Conrad Polson. I'm the Algonquin chief from Timiskaming First Nation.

Rather than revising the funding formula, the federal government has instead financed initiatives under contribution agreements. However, these initiatives are not based on any serious or reliable cost analysis and fail to take into account all the recent developments in the provinces. Moreover, this is very demanding on the school administrators of our communities at several levels: multiplication of project presentations and activity reports; non-flexibility of programs; allocations based on the fiscal year, which is different from the school year; delays in funding allocations; impossibility for long-term planning.

The department's public servants themselves admit during meetings that these ways to proceed create an overwhelmingly demanding and intricate accounting, but they have to apply it in the rules. The two new INAC programs equally launched under contribution agreements are perfect illustrations. The first announcement was made in February 2008, and the guidelines of these new programs were released only in December 2008, nine months after their announcement. The first nations organizations had until February 16, 2009, to present complex submissions. They were given less than two months, Christmas holidays inclusive.

The department took more time than scheduled to give its decision, as late as mid-June, despite having the commitment to do so in mid-March. In addition to this three-month delay, the decision will be announced at the end of the school year, when the schools are closing for summer holidays—a typical example of INAC inefficiencies.

It is more than obvious that the gaps in funding and the administrative abuse and requirements seriously thwart our capacity to provide the services that provincial schools are able to offer, or comparable working conditions. If such restrictions continue to be imposed on us, I have reason to fear for the future of our schools. How can we be competitive under such conditions? How can our education system survive and ensure survival of our cultures and of our languages?

Meegwetch.

● (0915)

[Translation]

Chief Ghislain Picard (Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, First Nations Education Council): Thank you very much. I will be completing the presentation.

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen members of the Standing Committee, I am very pleased to have this opportunity to appear before you today. Indeed, we have appeared before the Committee on a number of occasions in the past.

In Quebec, we have set up a series of institutions that represent the communities. I believe our primary duty is to support these institutions, because they were designed and established for the communities that we represent. However, on a more personal note—

and I am sure I reflect the opinion of the vast majority of chiefs in this regard—I have to say that there is a certain weariness with the political or parliamentary process, because it always turns out to be a dead-end.

I want to emphasize that point because two weeks ago, we were at the UN precisely to talk about education. The process has reached the point where we have to appeal to international organizations in order to know what is going on in Canada with respect to its outdated policies, which in no way meet the real needs of First Nations. A partial explanation for that is probably the fact that the First Nations are very much at the mercy of a federal government which has complete latitude to be both judge and judged when it comes to education and its relationship with the First Nations. That means it can reject hundreds of studies and at least as many, if not more, recommendations that have been made repeatedly, without fear of repercussions for its electorate.

Education is only the tip of the iceberg. The problem is much more widespread and affects other areas that are an integral part of the everyday lives of people in our communities.

It is clear to us that no government would dare to act in a similar manner as regards education funding for other Canadians without fearing for its chances of being re-elected. I am concerned that the FNEC's work on education funding and the development of a new funding formula will meet the same fate as hundreds, perhaps thousands, of previous studies.

It is difficult for us to continue to believe—rightly so—in the federal government's desire to put an end to the underfunding of First Nations programs, particularly education programs. We have been burned too often and, as the expression goes: “once bitten, twice shy”.

I am therefore calling on the Committee to demand a formal commitment from the federal government to follow up on the Council's work with respect to the development of a new funding formula, given that it has failed to do so itself in cooperation with the First Nations, contrary to the commitment it made.

We are recommending—putting a little more water in our wine, once again—that a small group of two or three experts designated by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, as well as two or three experts designated by the FNEC, do an analysis of the Council's proposed formula, and that the federal government pledge to abide by the findings of that expert group and act on them quickly. We are also recommending that this group be put together quickly and have no more than six months to carry out its work.

Thank you.

● (0920)

The Chair: Thank you. I want to thank you for your presentations.

We are now going to begin the first round of questioning.

Mr. Russell, you have seven minutes.

[English]

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

Good morning to each of the witnesses. I'm glad to have you with us.

Your brief certainly outlined the funding gaps and structural problems or challenges in the system, and there's been more than one study carried out on this particular issue. In Labrador we have only two first nations schools that fall under the Quebec-Labrador AFNQL, Sheshatshiu and Natuashish. Then we have the Inuit and the Métis, which basically fall under the provincial government system.

There has been no comparison done on the output, on the completion rates in primary and secondary. There have been no comparative studies done, at least none that I'm aware of in my particular jurisdiction, but it seems as though we have not narrowed the gap with the rest of the Canadian population at all when it comes to first nations education, in terms of attainment and coming out of secondary school.

I was reading Mendelson's report, and he was saying that the statistics from 1996 to 2006 basically remained the same: only 40%, or somewhere in that range—maybe even less—graduate from high school.

He recommends an increase in funding, but an increase in funding alone will not solve the problem. This is what he advocates, and you may argue with me around this point: he says that funding is necessary—that we have to have the schools and the money for their operation—but he also says that we need a second level of services and a tertiary level of services for it to be adequate.

Is that the approach that you take as well, in terms of first nations education systems, as opposed to...? A lot of times we just advocate; we say that we have to build more schools and we need more schools. We know that. We say we have to upgrade our schools and maintain them and things like that. We need more teachers and we need money for operations. I think we all realize that. We all know that the 2% funding cap is problematic and should be removed.

I'm just wondering.... In a way, you're the second level of services, if I could make that comparison. With what you do, do you see any improvements in the Quebec experience or in the experience of those who fall under your council? Is there any improvement in terms of those first nations schools that don't have those second-level services?

I'm also trying to get to the structural issues, so I'm wondering what your feeling is on the B.C. example of first nations jurisdiction over education. I'm wondering about those aspects. Also, what is your view on a first nations education authority act, as Mendelson puts it, which would be an opt-in type of approach?

• (0925)

Ms. Lise Bastien: I'm going to try to answer some of your questions.

First of all, in reference to the B.C. agreement, we are not really involved at all in the process. We don't know about the results so far. We don't have any confirmation that the B.C. agreement is working well and has good results. It may be working well, but I don't think it's the avenue that we are looking for in Quebec.

Mr. Todd Russell: The B.C. agreement was only signed a couple of years ago, and they're still negotiating funding arrangements under the act itself. I'm just wondering about it as model, as an approach.

Ms. Lise Bastien: No, we did not really look at this model. I mean, we looked at it, but it's not really the model that we'd like to see in Quebec.

We also don't have the same situation as B.C., because we have a lot of band schools, schools owned by first nations. In B.C. the situation is different; they have a lot of student populations attending provincial schools. What we would like to have in Quebec is a reinforcement of our band schools.

You were talking about second-level services and all the structural aspects. We think it's really important that if we want to have good results, we need to consider all aspects of education, which means, of course, appropriate funding for schools at the community level. This is essential. However, communities alone and schools alone can't afford all the components and requirements that will make a good system, so you need second-level services.

We've been doing it a bit, you know, but as our organization is still an anomaly, we do it on a project basis, which is not good at all, because education needs to be based on recurrent funding so that you can develop a vision for your school and for your education.

We did our homework. We did many surveys on second-level services, and we have all the results, but when we presented it to the DIA last fall, in November 2008, they said, "Well, we have no money for that. It's good, thank you, but that's it."

I think it's also really essential to improve and support communities that don't have a big population. They are entitled to quality services.

We also think that we need to go further than high school; we need to develop our own post-secondary system as well.

The Chair: I think you have about 30 seconds left, Mr. Russell.

Mr. Todd Russell: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lemay, of the Bloc Québécois, please.

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Thank you very much for being here.

There is no need for you to explain how the system works in Quebec. It seems to me that, if I did not understand that, I would not deserve to be here.

I do not agree either with the idea of coming back with a report and fresh requests year after year. We have to find some concrete solutions. The first solution, in my opinion, is to get rid of the 2% cap as soon as possible, and on an urgent basis. Whether the government or someone else does it, it has got to go. The money has got to flow.

I want to try and understand something. In many provinces other than Quebec, there are agreements in place between the Ministry of Education in those provinces and various Aboriginal communities whose members attend schools in those provinces. If I understood correctly, this is not the system favoured by the Assembly of First Nations in Quebec and Labrador. Did I get that right, Ms. Bastien?

Ms. Lise Bastien: That is correct.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I have concerns in two areas. The first has to do with education at the primary and secondary levels. As far as I am concerned, it is critical that this be developed by the Assembly of First Nations. However, there is the whole question of occupational training and I am not sure what solution you have in mind. I am going to put this in my own words, and with the greatest of respect for the Grand Chief of Timiskaming. I am not certain a machine tool will find its way into the school in Timiskaming if the Rivière-des-Quinze Secondary School already has one.

Is there a potential for agreements to be reached between the communities that are part of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador and schools in some boards that provide occupational training? And, if such agreements already exist, are you responsible for managing them? Do you control them?

● (0930)

Ms. Lise Bastien: I can give you a partial answer. Occupational training also has a connection to secondary level education. Under the Quebec school system, as in the other provinces, secondary schools offer occupational training. They grant vocational school diplomas, known as a DEP in Quebec. That is something that our secondary schools and communities do not have, because of the lack of funding. There is "zero funding" for occupational training in our secondary schools.

That means that our communities are not able to introduce occupational training for our young people at the Grade 9, 10 and 11 levels. What has been proven is that different approaches, such as occupational training, are major assets in terms of countering the drop-out problem. Before we lose young people in Grade 9, we are often able to keep them in school by offering occupational training. In addition to that, there is the whole matter of occupational training at the post-secondary level.

I will give Mr. Sioui a chance to comment, because we also conducted a study on that. I believe that all of our studies have been completed now. I hope we will not have to do any more. The fact is we have the figures and models on occupational training.

Mr. Raymond Sioui: As part of the socio-economic forum, a commitment was made to fund two studies, one on occupational training, and the other on second-level services. We have completed both studies.

In the study we conducted on occupational training, we obviously looked at the many different types of occupational training that are

currently available—training that can be provided without too many requirements at the secondary level, training that has to be provided as part of a group offering or at the regional level, and training that is far more specialized and has to be provided by highly specialized provincial centres. That is what we looked at.

As well, we reviewed the guidance approach used in Quebec, which is part of the diversified streams that are offered in all schools, and for which no funding is provided in our schools.

It is very important that students receive appropriate guidance when they arrive in Grades 8 and 9 and it is known that they will not necessarily attend university, because that is not their goal. They can be kept in school through the provision of occupational training. There are different options available. We carried out a very comprehensive study of this as well, which is ready to be released.

Chief Ghislain Picard: I would just like to add one thing to complete that answer, but I am hesitant to do so because some people might think we are still doing all right, in spite of our dissatisfaction.

Last Saturday, I attended a graduation ceremony for 49 people trained to provide family and paraprofessional support services. These are programs designed based on the reality in our communities in cooperation with the Forestville Occupational Training Centre. For those of you who know your geography, that is on the North Shore of Quebec. I think that is a possibility, as long as the communities agree. That does not, and should not, prevent the communities themselves from taking their own initiatives in this area.

In the same vein, I believe that, in a few weeks time, if I am not mistaken, a virtual training centre will be officially inaugurated that involved the work of two communities—namely Mashteuiatsh and Kahnawake. I would not say this was done under the aegis of the Quebec Construction Commission, but it is certainly connected to discussions with the Commission. These are initiatives that flow directly from the communities. I think that there are possibilities in both of those areas, as long as the communities are on side. That is an area where there must be greater focus.

● (0935)

Mr. Marc Lemay: How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You only have about 20 seconds.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Would you like to add something, Chief Polson?

[English]

Chief Conrad Polson: Yes. Timiskaming First Nation has no specific agreement with the school in Notre-Dame-du-Nord. But we are faced with a problem. Our school runs from K to grade 8, and when our children decide they want to go to a French school, we encourage them to get their education wherever they choose. But the funding we get for our children on reserve is about \$4,500 per child. When they go to the provincial system, we basically have to pay double, and we don't get extra funding to be able to cover those costs. So that causes a lot of problems and uncertainty for our teaching staff to be able to continue, because it takes away some of their funding.

The special needs in our schools are very great on reserve. I find a lot of that has to do with the residential school impacts and the generational impacts involved. So the special needs on reserve are very great.

The Chair: We'll have to finish up with that, Chief. Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Lemay.

Ms. Crowder, you have seven minutes.

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Merci.

Thank you very much for coming before the committee today.

I was looking at a report called "The Potential Contribution of Aboriginal Canadians to Labour Force, Employment, Productivity and Output Growth in Canada, 2001-2017". I know you're familiar with the report. I just wanted to bring up a couple of points.

It says:

Aboriginals with a high school diploma or higher had significantly better labour market outcomes, both in absolute terms and relative to non-Aboriginal Canadians, than those who did not.

The potential contribution of Aboriginal Canadians to the total growth of the labour force between 2000 and 2017 is projected to be up to 7.4%.

If Aboriginal Canadians were, by 2017, able to increase their level of educational attainment to the level of non-Aboriginal Canadians in 2001, the average annual GDP growth rate in Canada would be up to 0.036 percentage points higher, or an additional cumulative \$71 billion....

I want to thank you again for your very good work, your analysis, and your persistence.

We know the information is before us. We know there's a funding gap. No matter which province in Canada you're looking at, there's a funding gap.

We have many reports that talk about the significant contribution that first nations, Métis, and Inuit make to their communities, to their provinces, and to the country as a whole, a contribution they have the potential to increase. Have you yourselves done that kind of analysis about lost opportunities? I think there's a lot of other work, but the second piece of it is to know what is getting in the way of correcting this imbalance.

Ms. Lise Bastien: No, I don't think we did that analysis, but we know for sure that everything we've been doing, all the surveys and analyses, we did on our own. It's really demanding, actually, because we don't see any positive outcomes for our communities.

I think the only answer I can give is that there's a time to understand, and I think this is the time to understand. With the economic crisis we have, yesterday we had confirmation that the government would invest in GM. I don't think they had an analysis of the impact, but they know that if they don't invest, they're going to have the huge impact of loss of employment and so on. I think it's the same thing in education.

We know, as you mentioned, that there's a huge gap, and we can't deliver occupational skills programs, technology programs, libraries, and so on, because we don't have money for that. I think education

needs to be considered as an investment, because if we don't do something now, we're going to pay sooner or later.

I think we can actually confirm that we are paying a lot in social costs. It's really expensive in our communities. I'm not saying we're going to solve everything, but I'm sure we would be able to solve part of it if we had a good educational system. We'd be able to lower our social cost expenses.

• (0940)

Ms. Jean Crowder: I wonder if you could comment, Chief Picard. We have the information, so why aren't we moving?

Chief Ghislain Picard: Well, to me the answer is certainly obvious, and it's probably a question that could be best answered by not only this committee but by parliamentarians in general. Part of the answer lies in the statement by the Auditor General in 2000, which essentially says that the cost of doing nothing is more important. To me, there lies part of the answer, but at the same time I think that, as Lise just put it, the less you do in this area, the more cost it's going to involve for the federal government in the short, medium, and long terms.

I know our main focus this morning is education, but if the federal government were to take some time to think about housing, for instance, and try to bridge the gap in housing, where the occupancy rate has almost doubled in aboriginal communities compared to other Canadian homes, then in the medium and long term that also might have impacts on education. I think we all understand that.

It's the same for health and for other areas pertaining to our first nations reality. To me, that's part of the answer, but overall, I think it's certainly something that deserves a closer look.

In a way, we've done that: between 1992 and 1996 the federal government spent \$60 million producing a report. It was something that had never been done in the past and it hasn't been done, of course, since then. We had all the answers, and that was probably the only report that was really able to get unanimity in terms of the support from our chiefs. The blueprint was there, and it's still there, with no real movement.

The Chair: We're out of time, Madam Crowder.

Could I interject here? Chief Picard, could you name the report that you just referred to there, or tell us the date of it?

Chief Ghislain Picard: It's the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, 1992-1996.

The Chair: Okay, pardon me. I just wanted to be clear what you were referring to. I appreciate that.

[Translation]

Mr. Albrecht, you have the floor for seven minutes.

[English]

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

I want to thank our witnesses for being here, and especially Ms. Bastien, for your patience in asking for the report that we received. I appreciate that.

A number of weeks ago the committee had the privilege of visiting Kitigan Zibi. We were very warmly welcomed there as a committee, and it was certainly a very educational tour. Part of the tour included going through the school there, and I found that very encouraging, actually. The facilities seemed good, the staff were cheerful, and the kids seemed to be enjoying their environment, but one of the things that stood out to me was that when we arrived in the library, we were informed that there are no funds for libraries in schools.

Subsequent to that we received this booklet, which I looked at on the way home in the bus. On page 25 it says that the current funding formula does not include costs for essential elements of a school system, such as libraries, technology, sports and recreation, or first nations languages. Then in our briefing notes today from the Library of Parliament, in the third bullet on page 3, that statement is basically repeated: it says the funding model does not include libraries, information and communications technology, sports and recreation, and so on.

Obviously this caused me some concern, because my kids have benefited from libraries, as my grandkids are benefiting now. It seems to me that's a very essential component of funding for education, so I asked my staff to do some research on it, and the information that I have from the department does not jibe with the statements I'm reading in either the Library of Parliament's briefing notes or your report.

I'm going to read a bit from the department's notes here:

Funding of Schools - School Space Accommodation Standards

INAC funds schools on reserve according to its Schools Space Accommodation Standards. The School Space Accommodation Standards provide space for libraries within the schools in First Nation school projects but not for library buildings outside of the school. These standards for libraries within the schools are defined as part of the Special Purpose Areas which include: Administrative Areas, Multi-purpose Rooms, Library/Resource Centers, Auditorium/Gymnasium, Science Rooms, Home Economic Rooms, Industrial Arts Rooms, Commercial/Computer Rooms and Other Areas.

Then it goes on to identify the actual standards. A smaller school with a projected enrolment of 35 to 60 would normally have only a multi-purpose room with a shared library function. Larger elementary schools—and certainly Kitigan Zibi would fit this category—with an enrolment of 61 students or greater would be provided with a dedicated library resource centre.

There's something missing in the picture here, and I was wondering if you could explain why these funding allocations that the department outlines in its information were somehow omitted from this report.

● (0945)

Ms. Lise Bastien: I think you refer to funding for *immobilisation* for space. It's within the standards for school construction. You're right, in school construction norms, they have standards for libraries.

But we know that there's a huge gap in school construction money too.

But here's another thing. The funding formula for schools does not cover the operation of a library, the books, the technician, the librarians, and the software to manage a library. There's no component in the funding formula for the operation, for the inside of the box.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: So you're saying to me that INAC has funding for the space for the libraries within the school projects, but that once that library is put up, there is no staff, there are no books, there are no computers, there are no science—

Ms. Lise Bastien: That's it. And I can't meet any of the people who work at the administration centre. I know about that funding. I was there at the time they put it down 20 years ago, and there's nothing for books and the operation.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Then can you explain to me why on page 25 it says it doesn't include costs for essential elements of a school system such as libraries? Because obviously libraries are included. I think there remains to be a little clarification on the actual wording within the report.

The other question I would have is that it's my understanding that there are other departments within the federal government that do contribute in significant ways to education. It's not only at the secondary level but the post-secondary as well. It's my understanding that through HRSDC our government is providing an additional \$200 million over three years to support the aboriginal skills development program, and \$75 million in the new two-year aboriginal skills and training strategic investment fund.

So could you give a global picture for ordinary Canadians like me to understand that there are different departments within the federal government? If you look at them in isolation, you may say this isn't adequate; but when you take the different silos of departments within the federal government, take them in a global sense, there are in fact increased dollars and resources available to aid in the development of the education component for aboriginal people. I commend you for your interest and your advocacy on the part of education. I just want to make sure that we have a complete picture.

● (0950)

Ms. Lise Bastien: Do I have time for an answer?

I think you refer to the same thing the province has, but these programs don't go to the school. It's employment measures you're talking about. This is really different. It's not something that will help the elementary and high schools buy technologies or develop any occupational skills program.

Also, as a last point, the schools shouldn't be funded under an annual project. It should be recurrent and we should have a vision, a program in education.

The Chair: Actually we're out of time, but I see Chief Picard wished to add some additional comments, and we'll take some time for that. Just for 30 seconds, if we can, Chief.

Chief Ghislain Picard: Yes, for sure.

Certainly I'm interested in the human resources aspects. I just wanted to also respond to the question, because in year one, in 1995, when we signed the first agreement in human resources, we were already saying that there's a very important gap between what Quebec gets and what first nations get for the same area of activity. And as a matter of fact, according to our figures—although there's that envelope of \$200 million—we're still short about \$80 million, with 2009 figures. So there is already some catching up to do there as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Chief, and thank you, Mr. Albrecht.

Now we'll go to the second round, a five-minute round, and we'll begin with Mr. Bagnell, for five minutes.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you very much for coming.

I think the good news is you're making some progress if you see that all four parties here are shocked that we're not funding library operations. Obviously, something has to happen.

Before I ask my question, could you give me a clarification? There are more aboriginal people who live off reserve, in cities, etc., so if an aboriginal person lives in Montreal or Quebec, is their education totally funded by the Quebec government, or the provincial government if they're in a province, in a city?

Ms. Lise Bastien: If they live off reserve?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Yes.

Ms. Lise Bastien: If they attend a provincial school, it's paid by the federal government. We call it a transfer of payment.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: The federal government pays the Quebec government?

Ms. Lise Bastien: If you're on a reserve and you go to provincial schools, sometimes the payment comes through the band and sometimes through the federal government.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: So let's say you live in a highrise in Montreal. Is the amount the federal government pays the Quebec government for that student on a per capita basis the same amount that they spend on a per capita basis for schools on reserve?

Mr. Raymond Sioui: Well, outside of the reserve is not paid through an agreement with the band council. Through the agreement with the band council we know that when some school boards send a resident of a community to a provincial school, there are many examples where the federal government would pay much more to the

provincial school than they pay to send the same student residing on reserve to a first nations school. I think that's a major point.

The federal government would sometimes pay almost twice what they pay for a first nations school to receive the same child residing on reserve. For the outside, it doesn't go through the agreement with the community. It's a different transfer. We don't know too much about it.

• (0955)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Well, I hope you're not saying it's not public knowledge if the federal government is paying the provinces. Anyway, let's not spend time on that.

Ms. Lise Bastien: But there's something on special education that I think needs to be highlighted. Actually, there's a budget for special education, and if the province is asking money for special education kids, for first nations kids, it has a priority on the budget. So first nations have what remains on the budget and they don't ask for the same accountability.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Do you think there are any examples—maybe the chiefs would know—because of this inequality in the education systems, of parents actually moving off reserve in Canada so their children can attend a provincial school just because they're better funded? That would be a sad situation, but has that happened?

Chief Conrad Polson: No. People move off reserve because there's no money for housing for them, and that does create a problem in education funding.

But just to touch on what Lise was talking about in special education, we had a special high-needs child who had to go to a provincial school system. The Department of Indian Affairs had no problem paying \$48,000 for that one child. We brought him home and they spent the same \$48,000 for three children on reserve. So these are the problems we're facing in those areas.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: The Department of Indian Affairs pays, in the welfare system, in social assistance, penny for penny what the province pays. It's different in different provinces, but they match exactly penny for penny. So is it not inconsistent that in education they don't match penny for penny the provincial rates, that they pay a lot less on the education system on reserve?

Chief Conrad Polson: I don't think they pay the same in social assistance on reserve as they do off reserve.

Ms. Lise Bastien: The thing is, the tuition fees vary according to a region, not a province. In their funding formula they have to look at what type of school, the population, the social-economic situation, so there are factors to establish a tuition fee. That's why it's not as easy as the welfare system that is penny for penny. It's not the same thing.

So for comparable schools, we found out that in Quebec and in New Brunswick they pay more. Let's say they pay \$12,000 per student, and in some cases they pay \$13,000, and in another case they pay up to \$22,000 per student. So it's different.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

In fact, there is no more time for questions or comments.

[English]

Chief, you can fit that in. Do you have a brief comment?

Chief Ghislain Picard: I have a very brief comment, and I'll be very blunt.

I think the intent is very clear here. It's to get the Indians out of the reserve and under the provincial system, in housing as well as in education. That's why the B.C. model is cited as a model across the nation. I think sometimes we tend to be too quick at painting everybody with the same brush. Quebec has a higher percentage of Indians living on reserve than does any other region in the country except for the north.

The Chair: Thank you, Chief.

Now we'll go to Mr. Clarke for five minutes. Mr. Clarke.

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for attending here today.

The issue of education for first nations plays a big role in my life. Without education, I wouldn't be here. I'd also like to point out that I am first nations. I'm the only first nations member in the House of Commons. We do have self-identified Métis recognized as well. We're all here to understand education.

From my own past experiences, if it weren't for education, I wouldn't have had a job, I wouldn't have progressed, and probably I wouldn't be here today as an elected member of Parliament. I think some of the onus is on some of the first nations to take pride in ourselves and attend post-secondary education. I had to pay for part of my post-secondary education. I did have help from INAC, and I'm very grateful for that, but sometimes we have to take it upon ourselves to proceed further and continue our own education to whatever measures or goals we might want to attain.

Back in 2006, with the past minister for INAC, Jim Prentice, the First Nations Education Council and the Assemblée des Premières Nations du Québec et du Labrador signed a memorandum of understanding on education. The First Nations Education Council also received a contribution of some \$731,000 for various initiatives, including \$150,000 to implement the MOU and \$365,000 to study the feasibility of creating first nations post-secondary education. Can

you tell me the status of implementation of the study and where the study is now? Do you know?

•(1000)

Ms. Lise Bastien: I think you're mixing two things. Minister Prentice was at the forum, and we signed an agreement for a second-level services study that we presented in November. We got the *fin de non recevoir* that the work that had been done was quite good, but they didn't have money to implement it.

The other thing you referred to was on the post-secondary institutions in Quebec.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Is that on the \$150,000 to implement the MOU?

Ms. Lise Bastien: No; it's for the MOU, but this was for the second-level services.

Mr. Rob Clarke: It was for second-level services. Was this study tabled?

Ms. Lise Bastien: Yes.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Do you have a copy of that study that you would be able to provide to the committee?

Ms. Lise Bastien: Yes, we'll send you a copy.

I don't remember the name of the ADM we presented it to. I remember they thanked us for the good work, and they said that it would be useful for them, but they didn't have money to implement second-level services or to give follow-up on the results of that study. But yes, it has been done.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Do you know the date it was completed?

Ms. Lise Bastien: Do you mean when we presented it or tabled it?

Mr. Rob Clarke: Yes.

Ms. Lise Bastien: It was November. I'll find out the exact date.

Mr. Rob Clarke: It was 2008.

Ms. Lise Bastien: Yes.

Mr. Raymond Sioui: I would like to add that in the memorandum we signed, there was a commitment to collaborate with us on the implementation of a more comprehensive first nations education system. We were hoping that following the presentation of that study we would go forward with that commitment, but the only answer we got was, "Nice study. Well done. It will help us in the future, but we have no money to fund this." That was a very difficult answer when we presented the study. We did nice work, and they had no money to fund it, but they recognized the work that we had done.

Mr. Rob Clarke: I'm just curious here, coming from my home first nations community. I'm curious on the funding allocation provided to the first nations in Quebec. I know it goes back and forth with population, but I'm just kind of curious. For yourself, Chief Polson, how much funding is provided to your first nations for education right now? Who has control of the education portfolio?

Chief Conrad Polson: For a band-operated school we have \$518,000 a year. We get maybe \$200,000 extra for special education. Then we have maybe another \$90,000, which may just disappear like that. That's what happens with a lot of the programs that are offered to the communities. They are never consistent, and for staff there is no security because from one year to the next the program will change. Have you noticed that the programs were announced last February, the criteria in December, and we're supposed to get results in mid-March, and then we still don't have the answers? We're going to summer holidays, and how do we plan for the next school year without those funds being committed when they're supposed to be?

• (1005)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Chief and Mr. Clarke.

I now recognize Mr. Lévesque, for five minutes.

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

Welcome to the Committee.

Of course, it is unpleasant to see that, in Canada, we can bring immigrants to this country and spend enormous sums of money trying to integrate them, and yet there are people born here that the government is not prepared to spend even small amounts of money on, so that they can really be part of Canada's population.

For example, in 2008, according to one study, there was a 6.2% loss in terms of minimum allocations needed to fund education which, as Grand Chief Picard mentioned, represents something like an additional \$80 million that should be made available. Can we reasonably say that, this year, \$90 million more would be needed to upgrade the educational system?

Furthermore, can you tell me whether the governance system for the monies allocated to the First Nations educational system is geared to today's needs?

Mr. Raymond Sioui: A little earlier, I referred to the need to remove the 2% cap. It is important to remember that this 2% has had an impact for more than 10 years and has resulted in funding losses for the First Nations over a 10-year period. Therefore, we are talking about a cumulative loss in Canada of more than \$1.5 billion. For the 2008-09 fiscal year alone, I believe we are talking about a loss of \$233 million for Canada as a whole. In Quebec, that loss is proportional. I believe that for 2008-09, it is about \$25 million. The cumulative loss for Quebec was about \$90 million. So, there needs to be some serious analysis and consideration of all that has been lost over the last 10 or 12 years, and a plan to allow us to catch up.

In answer to your second question, it is very important to have a more objective and more structured mechanism—hence the importance we attach to a funding formula geared to the needs of

our schools that reflects all of our costs. That formula has never been reviewed. If someone thinks that a formula developed in 1988, based on an existing amount... They said there was this much money for tuition fees and split out the remainder.

As you say, in Quebec, more than \$2,000 at the primary level, and more than \$3,000 at the secondary level, is allocated to francize newcomers to Canada. This formula allocates approximately \$400 to the First Nations for Aboriginal language and second language instruction. Is there something comparable in that regard? These are threatened languages.

The formula is outdated. If people are prepared to argue that it is not outdated, well, let them try, but they will have quite a challenge.

Ms. Lise Bastien: I also think you can always make comparisons—for example, when it comes to language instruction—but we have to stop improvising here. You do not improvise when you are funding things as critical as educational systems. You cannot say, for example, that this year, since we only have so many million dollars, people will just have to make due with that. Allocations have to be based on a needs analysis.

You could not come along and ask Canadians how much they are receiving for education, and just decide that that is enough, without first assessing actual educational requirements. All of the provincial systems have gone through that exercise. They determined what is needed for a quality system of education. After that, they look at how much that will cost and how much needs to be invested. You cannot just say we won't talk about needs, because this is all the money we have.

[English]

The Chair: You have 40 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Also, Chief Polson, could you tell me whether the current system of governance is adequate and whether it allows you to make your own decisions?

[English]

Chief Conrad Polson: Are you asking if the programs are adequate?

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: I am talking about the governance system. Do you have the power to set amounts and decide where you will be investing the money?

• (1010)

[English]

Chief Conrad Polson: No, we have to follow the criteria that are basically imposed on us to be able to operate the schools and stuff for education.

I wanted to comment on your very first comments about how this country is so willing to support immigrants who come to this country but finds it so difficult to support the first nations, who are actually the first people to be part of this country. Ms. Crowder talks about an imbalance; I think it's going to continue to be that way until the federal government starts to acknowledge and accept the fact that aboriginals have aboriginal rights and title over their territories. If a fair share of those natural resources were coming to the communities, we would not have to sit in these rooms and beg the government for dollars that actually belong to the communities.

I'm sorry, but that's been bugging me all morning. I've been wanting to say that, because those are the realities we're faced with.

[Translation]

The Chair: That's great.

Thank you, Mr. Lévesque.

Mr. Rickford, for five minutes.

[English]

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

And thank you to the witnesses for coming today on a very important subject and component of first nation issues.

I've had the opportunity to live in isolated communities in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and the Arctic Circle—not at all in Quebec—and I consider myself somewhat familiar with them. And I share some concern that there have been varying states of schools across the country in terms of their physical state and their capacity to deliver services, particularly beyond post-secondary and in terms of training. My own success in working with a number of isolated first nations communities has been that when you get the training proximally, either in the community or nearby, there's a better determinant for success. And we're working on that.

We heard earlier today that there may be funding gaps and structural problems. I would suggest with the greatest of respect that these are not phenomena of the last three years but they are in fact phenomena of perhaps the last twenty years, in generational terms, as first nations generally work in a ten- to fifteen-year plan. And we heard Chief Picard talk about an Auditor General's report identifying in the year 2000 the cost of doing nothing. So these are things I think any recent government would have to build on.

It seems to me there's a lot of good news out there. This particular government's plan has been to invest an additional \$268 million over five years—and I see some nodding, suggesting acknowledgment—and \$75 million a year subsequent to that. This is over and above the \$1.7 billion that is invested in first nations education.

I can only say that in the last eight months that I've been a member of Parliament, we've announced at least ten new schools to be built in isolated first nations communities across the country. So given this torrid pace we're currently working at, I think we seek to deal with some very serious issues with respect to on-reserve schooling, certainly something I don't think previous administrations may be able to talk about.

I want to talk about moving forward here, in the last couple of minutes. FNEC has advocated for the re-establishment of first

nations control over education. Specifically, what we're looking at is the government education partnership program, the tripartite education partnerships, and working with the provinces to collaborate more between first nation schools and organizations.

I've read your reports and I understand some of the concerns you have. But I also know that, on the flip side of this, some of the provinces have worked well with first nations communities to the extent that they make sure that when first nations students graduate from those primary and secondary schools they are at par with students from other provincial schools. And that has some benefit for their entry requirements into colleges and universities.

Do you support this kind of program? And certainly if not, why? And do you agree that our government, in general, has made steps in the right direction on a number of superordinate goals to address or remedy some of the unfortunate issues around education in the 13 years prior to our taking such action?

•(1015)

The Chair: You have about one minute. No, actually you have one minute and seven seconds. But we can come back—

Ms. Lise Bastien: Thank you.

I won't say you know that we disagree with the two initiatives that have been launched. The problem is that if you give money to a provincial school to improve services, you need to give the same thing to a band school in order not to compromise the gap between them and not to favour the integration of first nations into provincial schools.

I agree with you that first nations students should be at par. So why not look at the actual funding formula, which is not at par with the province, and make the important changes we need to make within our first nations schools?

Mr. Greg Rickford: But wouldn't you say the nature of this tripartite relationship is to identify what resources...? We heard earlier that it may not be simply a resource issue, that there may be substantive dimensions to education—and that may not be a resource issue—that prevent us from standardizing that.

Ms. Lise Bastien: The tripartite program concerns only first nations students who attend provincial schools.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Do I have more time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: In fact, Mr. Rickford, we have finished up here.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Okay. I'll respect the rules and go for next round.

The Chair: Now we'll go to Madam Crowder for a second question, for five minutes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you.

I just want to comment on this. Despite the fact that there has been some investment in capital projects in schools this year, I want to turn to the parliamentary budget officer's report, which says that there are "no specific appropriations by Parliament for funding First Nations school infrastructure" and that there's "limited data on expenditure related to school infrastructure" in first nations communities.

He goes on to say that "it is imperative to have a systematic approach and methodology to determine the annual funding that needs to be set aside each year by INAC for the First Nations school infrastructure". I just wanted to point that out because the parliamentary budget officer does a worst-case scenario and a best-case scenario, and no matter which scenario you use, it points to significant underfunding for first nations schools. That's the capital part.

I want to come back to the operating part just for one moment. A couple of people have talked about the B.C. agreement. I want to be on record here. I certainly do not speak for B.C. first nations, but they have told us on a number of occasions that the B.C. model is for B.C., and as for any suggestion that it's a cookie-cutter approach that can be applied to the rest of the country, the B.C. first nations simply don't support that.

The other issue with the B.C. agreement is that although it was very welcome in British Columbia, the fact of the matter is that the act has been in place now for a number of years and they still don't have the funding. I asked the minister as recently as last week, I guess, about what was happening with it, and they assured us that the negotiations were still ongoing. So three years later, those negotiations, which have direct impacts on children in those communities and on the ability of those schools to deliver first nations education to first nations students, are simply being undermined. So in case anybody wants to get out there and celebrate that agreement, I think it has to be put into the cold context of lack of money, as always.

I just wanted to talk about the operating part. The issue around libraries came up. Mr. Rickford rightly pointed out that it's not this government's initiative that there's no funding for libraries. I want to make it really clear. Actually, I was in a school recently where the department provided the funding to build the structure, but they actually had to rely on charity to fill the room with books. They used the Bartleman initiative in Ontario to fill that room with books.

I wonder if you could comment on the other services that are not part of your base funding. I believe technology isn't.

Ms. Lise Bastien: Yes. Technology is not included in the funding formula. Again, we are referring to the funding formula, which is inaccurate at this moment. Technology is not included, which means that there's no money for computers, software, hiring a technician, etc. There are also sports and leisure. For example, to have a

program of *sport-études*, there's nothing for that. There is \$215 per student for language retention and instruction.

• (1020)

Ms. Jean Crowder: I'm sorry, but did you say \$215 per student?

Ms. Lise Bastien: Per student, yes, which is just impossible. If you have a school of 150 students, as you can imagine, you can't hire a teacher or develop anything about languages.

There are occupational skills, which I mentioned earlier. There's no money to have that component, especially at the high school level.

What else is there?

Mr. Raymond Sioui: There was an important reform in Quebec. All the curricula were reviewed for all this. A lot of training was given to their teachers, administrators, and all of this. We got nothing for that, so how can you manage to take into consideration that reform? That's very important.

I would like to say that for occupational training, we have a letter—I think it's dated June 2006—from our administrator, the director of education of INAC, from headquarters, recognizing that their programs don't fund occupational training and that they were looking to work with us to review their programs. This also never happened. There are a lot of things.

I would like, if I can, to ask you to remember those two initiatives launched by the federal government, with about \$268 million over a five-year period. Well, as I said, only for 2008-09, we were losing \$233 million in one year. Our schools will still be losing over \$200 million or something like that, so I don't think they can manage with that much longer. They are less and less competitive and less and less in a position to offer the same services as other first nations and other provincial schools. They are asking their government to give comparable programs and services. This cannot last much longer, as you know. This will create an exodus to the provincial schools for all of this.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Duncan, for five minutes.

[English]

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

I'm quite concerned about what's been said here about the funding of libraries, for example. I too went to the Kitigan Zibi school. I understand they built a library in the school that was funded, and then they decided to expand the library and create a public library, as well. That's when the issue came in about non-funding.

The very next day, I was at the opening of a school in Big Horn, Alberta. They have a fully funded library and gymnasium. All of the things that your report and your testimony says are not funded indeed are funded. There are definitive statements from INAC that funding for libraries includes purchase of library materials, books, computers, multimedia, and furniture. I don't understand why we've got two solitudes here on this issue. It will be nice to get some clarity.

We were provided with this report. Now, I understand that this is a consequence of funding partially from HRSDC, but not INAC. Am I correct in that assumption?

Ms. Lise Bastien: No, it's about INAC.

Mr. John Duncan: But the funding for your organization to produce this report would have come from HRSDC, wouldn't it?

Ms. Lise Bastien: Not at all.

Mr. John Duncan: It's from INAC?

Ms. Lise Bastien: To produce the report, in fact, I think we didn't get money for that one. We got money for another one, but only about 10%. But not for this one.

• (1025)

Mr. John Duncan: Okay. Because when I pointed out the library statement to the department, they seemed to be completely unaware of that definitive statement. Of course it totally contradicts the policy of the department.

Ms. Lise Bastien: Are you talking about INAC?

Mr. John Duncan: Yes.

Ms. Lise Bastien: They were not aware of their funding formula, their own funding formula?

Mr. John Duncan: They weren't aware that you were making statements that are totally contradictory to the policy of the department, as if it is the policy of the department.

Mr. Raymond Sioui: It might depend on who you talk to at INAC, because we had a joint working group with INAC on the formula. They did a study too, in 2006. That study also reports that there is no funding to operate a library, and that was a joint study. So it depends, I guess, on who you talk to and how they interpret the formula. There might be an amount.

What we're saying is that there is no amount to operate a library and to renew the material through the funding formula. That's what we're saying, and it was said in a joint study with INAC too. I have a copy here. It's not translated, but it was said by a joint working group.

Ms. Lise Bastien: I don't know, maybe you have a new funding formula that we don't know about. But I can assure you that for the last 20 years we've been working with the same national funding formula, and it's not included at all.

Mr. John Duncan: Well, based on today's testimony, I'm sure we'll get to the bottom of it.

Now, earlier today you talked about the MOU that was signed in October of 2006 with INAC and the AFN of Quebec and Labrador and your counsel. I'm just wondering what the major elements were of that MOU and what actions were taken by your organization to try to implement that.

Mr. Raymond Sioui: Yes, as I said earlier, we did present at the forum. We had plans to implement some second-level services, but the minister instead decided to fund two more studies, mainly a vocational study and a study on second-level services. As I said, we got funding to do that major study on second-level services. We concentrated all our community and representatives, and we developed a five-year plan based on that to implement second-level services. And as I said earlier, there was a commitment from the minister that following that study, they would collaborate with us to implement second-level services. But now the answer is no, that they have no funding for that. So that was the major part of the agreement. As for the vocational training, we have been trying to educate the department over the last 12 or 15 years that there was a problem. It was recognized, and we have a study on this, and yet what have we done? We're waiting for INAC to act on it.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Duncan and Mr. Sioui.

I have no more names on my list after Mr. Russell. Do you have another question, Mr. Russell?

[English]

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

With all due respect to my colleague Mr. Rickford, the only torrid pace I saw was in the speech he just made. From the mid-1990s to the early-2000s, in fact there were on average 30 schools being built. That was certainly verified by the parliamentary budget officer, an independent authority. And I would also warn you that if this is their torrid pace, God forbid that they ever slow down.

I want to say that around this table we have to recognize that there is a gap. There seems to be some element of trying to cause confusion. There's a gap in the educational attainment and there is a gap in funding, and it has to be addressed. I think every party has to recognize that's the case. Where the blame rests is a source of argument for us as politicians. But the gap exists both in funding and in educational attainment, and there are structural or systems challenges that have to be addressed as well.

In terms of the funding, there is certainly going to be an issue around a new funding formula. But I want to get back to something I asked the Auditor General as well. What is your view on not an imposed piece of legislation, but an opt-in piece of legislation around an aboriginal education authorities act? I'm drawing a little bit of inspiration from the Caledon Institute. When I mentioned B.C., I only mentioned B.C. in the vein of wondering if you could take inspiration from it, not with the idea that you could just model it. Are there elements of it that could be employed or put into place?

I'm just wondering about having proper consultation, and not having an imposed act but taking a co-drafting type of approach, an opt-in type of approach. Would that be something that would be acceptable to your council? Maybe if we had some discussions with other authorities across the country, would that be something you would look at favourably?

• (1030)

Ms. Lise Bastien: Yes, we had that discussion previously, and I'm sure it would be acceptable as long as there's proper consultation and we have the proper structure to support that. But meanwhile we need to act quickly on the urgency of the gap and the services we are delivering to our students.

Mr. Todd Russell: Good. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Russell.

We'll go to Mr. Rickford.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Thank you.

I just have one comment on my colleague's comment. I think it's worth pointing out—and I don't want to get into a volleyball match, but it bears repeating—that had they been working at their apparent torrid pace, we probably wouldn't be building schools, because by their math there would be no more schools to build. So we're just trying to get it done.

I just want to shift, if I could, Chief Polson, to get your thoughts on language, culture, and this whole idea of assimilation. I credit you for being a champion of protecting language and culture. Obviously, having spent close to a decade of my life living in isolated first nations communities, over time I've gained a great appreciation for the fact that at least in northwestern Ontario and the Arctic, many of the children are coming through school and English remains their second language, which I think is fantastic, particularly in communities like Pikangikum. It's a real testament to their commitment.

The teachers aren't always speaking the local dialect of Ojibway, for instance, but the teachers' aides are filling in those gaps. Indeed, I've been involved in some early childhood development pedagogy that looks at integrating strong cultural exercises and the use of the language in preparation for that.

Would you share the view that education authorities, in general, in each community should be afforded the opportunity to have flexibility in the development of the education they have to protect those kinds of things and that currently there is enough flexibility in the system to do that?

Chief Conrad Polson: Language is one thing to bring back the community, and it is definitely a plus, but there's a difference

between speaking the language and understanding the language. A word in Anishnabi means many different things, instead of just a translation. It could speak of a drum. A drum in the English language is a musical instrument, but a drum in the Anishnabi language means more. It's the heartbeat of Mother Earth and it can be heard across the country. We're faced with some very serious struggles with trying to bring back the culture along with the language.

Mr. Greg Rickford: In some parts of Canada, perhaps.

Chief Conrad Polson: In some parts.

Mr. Greg Rickford: In others, it's quite outstanding, I think. I know, actually.

Chief Conrad Polson: I am a traditional chief. I practise my tradition; I practise my culture. I don't know the language, so I have to go to the elders to understand what these teachings are. We have an Algonquin teacher in our school who is funded through the budget that is offered to the school. It's not a specific program that we have within our school. We have to make it fit for the benefit of our future generations.

• (1035)

Mr. Greg Rickford: That's great news.

Chief Conrad Polson: It's like if you have \$10, but you need to spend \$15. We have to move everything around within the programs to be able to meet our needs. Reporting on these things is always difficult. A lot of the communities and a lot of people are accused of mismanaging their funds, when it's not the case.

Mr. Greg Rickford: I'm not getting into mismanaging funds there, Chief. This is not an inflammatory question. This is just understanding.... I get the point that it's more than just language. I studied French very intensively, but you have to situate yourself in context to understand how the language can be an instrument of culture.

Chief Conrad Polson: Yes, that's why it's so hard for you to understand. It's not just there. It's the whole community; all the issues are linked.

Mr. Greg Rickford: I think I have a pretty good....

The Chair: We'll have to leave it at that. Do you want to finish your statement?

Mr. Greg Rickford: No, I want to stay within the confines, of course.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Rickford.

We have four more questions on the list, so we're going to try to keep those to about three minutes or so, with some short questions. We'll go to Monsieur Lemay, Madame Crowder, and Monsieur Bagnell, and then I have a final brief question as well.

Monsieur Lemay.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: I am well acquainted with the file. We will be receiving the “authorities” from the Department following today’s meeting. Other than the hypothetical possibility that the 2% will be done away with, what clear education-related questions would you like us to ask them in order to arrive at quick solutions?

Ms. Lise Bastien: The only thing that comes to mind is to ask them if they think the funding formula, which has not been reviewed in 20 years, is still adequate and, if their answer is no, what they intend to do about it.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Great. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: *D'accord.*

Madam Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I just want to go back to the point that Chief Polson raised about the fact that if you have students on reserve who go to off-reserve schools—provincial schools—the band is required to pay the provincial rate for that region and it does not get any additional funding to compensate for that gap. So in many cases you end up, as I understand it, with a shortfall in your education fund, because you’re having to pay out at a higher provincial rate.

Do I have that correct?

Chief Conrad Polson: Yes, that’s correct.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Do you have the reverse situation, with provincial students coming on reserve to first nation schools?

Chief Conrad Polson: Yes, we do.

Ms. Jean Crowder: At what rate do you get paid? Or do you?

Chief Conrad Polson: What the Western Quebec School Board was told to do was to pay the same rates as the Department of Indian Affairs pays.

Ms. Jean Crowder: So even if those provincial students go to a provincial school, the provincial government would pay the provincial regional rate, but when they actually go to a first nation school, even though they are not reserve children, the provincial government actually gets a break on its education rate.

Chief Conrad Polson: Yes.

• (1040)

Ms. Jean Crowder: How do you make up the shortfall then?

Chief Conrad Polson: That’s why I say it creates a lot of uncertainties for the teaching staff to be able to commit to coming back year after year. In our case, we have been very fortunate to have teachers who basically fell in love with the community; even though the salary is at least 30% less than what they would get off reserve, they keep coming back because they love working with the kids. They love the atmosphere and are very dedicated to what they do.

It is definitely difficult. If we hire a group of teachers for next fall and 10 or 20 kids decide to go to a different school, then we are stuck with the contract and still have to pay for the teaching staff who are there, and that’s already 30% or 40% less than what we’re receiving.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Bagnell, you have three minutes.

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell: I wonder if you have any estimates of the increase in the cost of inflation each year for the education system, and also an estimate of the increase in aboriginal population in the education system, because these are obviously going to increase your costs over and above the fact your funding is not even sufficient at the moment.

Mr. Raymond Sioui: Over the period from 1996 to 2006, the increase should have been 6.2% in Canada, and in Quebec it was less; I think it was 4.3% or something like that. So the gap was 2%.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Are you talking about inflation?

Mr. Raymond Sioui: That is the growth of population and cost of living, both together, per year.

Here I have a document from the province saying that their spending on education has increased much more than inflation, at 31.9% versus 15.2% from 1999-2000 to 2006. So in the province, the growth of their budget has been higher than inflation and the growth of the population, but it was the opposite for first nations. So the gap is still bigger.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Right.

I have one last question. You talked briefly about language. I wonder if you could expand on that—and make sure you separate whether you’re talking about French or aboriginal languages.

My understanding is that when this government first came in, there was a huge cut in the proposed aboriginal funding in Canada. That was in the Canadian Heritage department, I think.

Ms. Lise Bastien: Well, again about the funding formula, I mentioned there was \$215 per student for language instruction. The program of Heritage Canada was for \$160 million over five years, and it was cut three or four years ago, I think.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Are you talking about aboriginal language?

Ms. Lise Bastien: Yes.

And we have a situation in our schools. In many of our schools we need to teach two languages—French and English—and we should primarily teach the aboriginal language, but of course you know the budget is not there.

Mr. Raymond Sioui: I would like, if I have time, to say it's very important to compare the same things. Sometimes we refer to funding coming from outside of education, but in Quebec and all other provinces, they also get funding coming from outside of education, so we have to be careful with that. Let's compare education with education.

And similarly, very often we hear about comparison with the average provincial school. We cannot compare a first nations school with the average of the provincial schools. We have to compare with comparable schools, taking into consideration socio-economic conditions, isolation, and all this, and language. So we have to be careful when they make comparisons with the average provincial school. That is not good.

The Chair: I just had a couple of very brief questions.

I'll first go to Madame Bastien. You made a comment and actually cited a quote from Monsieur Bryant, the former Ontario Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, as well as Premier Charest. And the comment was that the funding difference equalled half. I wonder if you could just clarify the context of the half, because I see the gap is identified in your report at around 4.3%. What do you think Premier Charest meant by saying that the funding gap was half?

Ms. Lise Bastien: First of all, Premier Charest mentioned that twice the difference was 100%, but I don't know where he got the numbers, because we have a little bit more in our survey. So I think it came after the program that was presented in the budget in February 2008, mentioning \$70 million for integration. After that, the provinces started questioning whether they were going to take first nations education under their system.

That's why I think we had all these things from different ministries of different provinces mentioning that it was good and that maybe they would be interested in having first nations education under the province. But there is a problem with the budget, and actually the budget they receive is too low.

I don't have the English version, but I know it was mentioned that before transferring anything of that sort, we would like to revisit the budget.

The Chair: Okay.

I have one other small point. I think it was Chief Picard who mentioned having some concern about why some of the education funding was coming through what you referred to as "financial contribution agreements". I wonder if you could give an example of a specific agreement or a program you were referring to within "financial contribution agreements".

Chief Ghislain Picard: The question could probably be best answered by Chief Polson, because he is involved in signing those agreements himself.

The Chair: Sure. Okay, thank you, Chief.

Chief Conrad Polson: Well, maybe I'll tell you about a teacher's salary enhancement. We receive \$14,000 a year to make salary adjustments for our teachers.

The Chair: And that's a specific program, or a certain line on your.... Okay.

Chief Conrad Polson: Yes, it's a specific program that's added in. The plug could be pulled on it any day.

The Chair: And is that separate from the so-called 2% cap? So you have this program out here called salary enhancement, which you can tap into. And is it on an application basis that you do that?

• (1045)

Chief Conrad Polson: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, so it's application-based. You apply for the salary enhancement, but would that then come over and above your 2% increase on general allocations?

Chief Conrad Polson: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, that's what I wasn't sure about.

Chief, did you wish to say something?

Chief Ghislain Picard: The only thing I would like to add, because we quoted the Auditor General, is that we could have put so many quotes from the Auditor General into the presentation, even the ones referring to the types of agreements signed between the government and our communities. Many of these agreements are failing to meet the reality of our communities.

And I think if there's one message that needs to be put before you this morning, it's to ask when we are going to take these issues seriously and go beyond partisanship and attack the situation head-on, because we seem to be, as I said, at the mercy of a process we obviously don't control. The price we pay is the situation we find not only in education but in all areas affecting our communities.

The Chair: Merci.

Chief Polson.

Chief Conrad Polson: I just wanted to add something. Mr. Lemay asked what question we'd like him to ask the Department of Indian Affairs. I guess the question would be how many thousands or possibly millions of dollars were spent on studies that ended up with the same results. When are they going to start to take action on these things?

I think everyone should put their egos aside and deal with the issue.

The Chair: I must say this has been a very informative meeting, and we appreciate your presentation here this morning and all of the questions from members. As you know, and as I'm sure all members realize, this is a critical question for aboriginal peoples across the country.

Witnesses, could you stay here for a minute before we break officially?

There is a small piece of business, if it's acceptable to the committee. I've circulated the agenda for the remainder of this session, which takes us up to June 23. If it's okay to proceed with this, we'll deal with a short piece of business and then we'll adjourn.

The three items in the left-hand column of your agenda for June 9, 16, and 23 in fact are what has been proposed by the subcommittee for the remainder of our session. You will see we're suggesting the 23rd in fact not be scheduled. We had already agreed we would not have a meeting on the 11th because of the anniversary of the residential school apology, so if it's acceptable—unless there are any other questions—we will proceed according to the agenda that has been circulated.

Monsieur Lemay.

• (1050)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: We had also agreed that, if there was a problem in terms of economic development in the North, we would look at the funding of First Nations governance. We talked about June 9 or 16. Is that okay?

[*English*]

The Chair: *Oui*. The funding—

Mr. Todd Russell: The support programs.

The Chair: The government support programs, yes.

That was our plan B, Monsieur Lemay, and in fact we will proceed accordingly if we are unable to get a good panel of industry on the question of economic development in the north.

Are there any other questions? There being no other questions, we'll proceed according to this and assume that's accepted.

Again, I compliment our witnesses this morning.

The meeting is adjourned. Thank you.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.