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Chair

Mr. Bruce Stanton

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• (1530)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC)): Good afternoon, members. This afternoon marks the third meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), we will proceed with the study of the Supplementary Estimates (C) 2009-10.

[English]

We're delighted to have back this afternoon Minister Chuck Strahl, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. He has with him as well today Madame Nicole Jauvin. Good to have you back. Nicole, of course, you know is the CEO of CanNor, the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency,

Perhaps for both of you, when the opportunity is appropriate, you can introduce your officials who are here with you today.

Before we start off, Minister, I'll just let members know that we only have one other item of business, which is some committee business dealing with some motions, so we'll dispense with our guests' presentations as quickly as we can, and once we're finished questions from members, we'll continue on with committee business.

At this point, I invite Minister Strahl to begin his comments, and then we'll move to Ms. Jauvin.

Minister Strahl.

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Thank you very much.

I would introduce Colleen Swords as well, who is our associate deputy minister over at INAC. It may be her first appearance here, so I know that you'll ask her some very pointed questions later, but she is ready. She is fully ready and has been a great addition to our team over at INAC. As well, Peter Traversy is here to answer a lot of the detailed financial questions I know you'll have. The whole team is assembled nearby. We hope to answer all your questions today, and for those we can't answer of course we'll get you answers, as we've done in the past, if necessary in written form or in other appearances.

[Translation]

Mr. Lemay mentioned that I should practice speaking French today. Since there are no cameras here today, this is a good opportunity for me to do so. So perhaps at the end of my remarks, I can answer in French.

[English]

I do thank everyone. It's good to be back here, especially to discuss the 2009-10 supplementary estimates (C) of the Department of Indian and Affairs, which were tabled in the House of Commons on March 3. I appreciate the important role that you play here in this committee in reviewing the expenditures of the Government of Canada and of this department especially.

As was outlined clearly in the recent Speech from the Throne, our Conservative government will continue to build a stronger, healthier relationship with aboriginal people. The supplementary estimates list many initiatives that are key to this relationship and will drive progress on important issues of concern to aboriginal people and indeed to all Canadians.

As outlined in the documents now before members of the committee, these initiatives total over \$224 million and effectively increase the department's budget for the current fiscal year to almost \$8 billion. I know that members of this committee are familiar with many other elements of the government's agenda: legislation to protect the rights of vulnerable citizens and accelerate the resolution of specific claims, for instance, tripartite arrangements on first nations education, and on-reserve child and family services, to name just a few.

The Speech from the Throne and budget 2010 highlight a number of areas where our government will focus its efforts to achieve a real and significant difference in the lives of aboriginal people. We will work hand in hand with aboriginal communities and with provinces and territories to reform and strengthen education and to support student success and provide greater hope and opportunity.

Over the last two years, the Government of Canada has expanded its partnership with the provinces, the first nations, and Inuit through several different agreements. You'll be familiar with some of these.

In April 2008 there was an MOU between New Brunswick first nations, the Province of New Brunswick, and the Government of Canada. In April 2009 the Inuit Education Accord was signed between the Inuit of Canada, as represented by ITK, and their partner organizations and governments. In October 2009 a letter of understanding for education was announced between the Government of Canada, the Province of Manitoba, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, MKO, and the Southern Chiefs Organization, another great development.

Just last month, another MOU was signed, this time between the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs of Alberta, the Government of Alberta, and the Government of Canada. On that great occasion, I was there to sign that MOU. As the aboriginal leaders in the room said, they felt it was a very historic moment. I was delighted to sign on behalf of Canada.

We will also introduce new legislative measures to further safe drinking water and effective waste water treatment on reserve. The progress the government has achieved in this area, in collaboration with first nations across the country, is unprecedented.

In 2006, when we took office, there were 193 high-risk first nation water systems. Today, that number has been significantly reduced to 44. In addition, 21 communities were identified as priorities, which meant that the community had both a high-risk system and a drinking water advisory. Today, only 4 communities remain on that list. There is more work to be done on this and that is partly why we need this new legislative framework.

As you know, last week we introduced Bill C-3, the legislation that corrects serious gender inequality issues that currently exist under the Indian Act. I appreciate the support we're hearing about this important legislation. It really is a gender equity issue and I do think we need to get at this quickly. I appreciate many of the comments I've heard from people around the table who are saying that we need to get at this quickly.

Our Conservative government will proudly be reintroducing legislation to ensure the equitable distribution of real property assets in the event of death—this is on reserve—and to further protect the rights of aboriginal people. Again, this is particularly important to women living on reserve.

We'll take action to address the disturbing number of unsolved cases of murdered and missing aboriginal women. I am delighted to see that in the budget.

Also, we will take steps to endorse the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in a manner fully consistent with Canada's Constitution and laws.

We also will continue the work that was started in Canada's economic action plan to ensure that the north's economic and social potential is fully and sustainably developed. Specifically on that, we will be working with our northern partners to promote and build investments in the north through the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency.

We'll continue our work on opening the northern project management office, which will provide a single point of contact for clients undertaking natural resources projects in the three territories. We'll build on the successes of programs such as SINED to ensure economic diversification and encourage northerners' participation in the economy.

• (1535)

I'm delighted again to see allocations for the next stages of building a world-class high-Arctic research station. That will be important for everything from climate issues to the scientific underpinnings for much of what needs to be done in understanding and working in the north for years to come.

We will reform the northern regulatory regime to ensure that the region's resource potential can be developed where commercially viable, while ensuring a better process for protecting our environment.

I think I had a question today on the successor program to the food mail program to help alleviate the costs of shipping healthy foods by air to isolated northern communities. We need to have a successor program. The program we have has done a valiant job, but it needs to be renovated and brought into the 21st century. We need to bring a program renovation forward on that, and we did get allocations in the budget to make that possible.

We want to proceed to give northerners a greater say over their own future and take further steps toward territorial devolution. There are important talks that are ongoing. We will continue to vigorously defend Canada's Arctic sovereignty, map our northern resources, and fulfill our obligations under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, for example, and other national and international efforts. We want to make sure that people not only in Canada but around the world know that Canada's north is Canada's, and we intend to use it and protect it, as Canadians would expect us to, from coast to coast.

Finally, we'll continue to work with other Arctic nations to settle boundary disputes that are well managed. These are kind of long standing, but they're also well managed in the sense that we have a good working relationship with other countries in those boundary areas.

I want to speak to a few of the items on the supplementary estimates themselves. On the Indian residential schools settlement agreement, \$120.5 million is for the settlement allotment, and \$18.9 million is to ensure that Canada meets its obligations under the agreement.

We all know the significance of the Indian residential schools settlement agreement. It was a huge milestone in the history of Canada's relationship with aboriginal people, and we're providing the resources to implement that agreement. Following on the supplementary estimates, budget 2010 has provided a further \$199 million over two years to support implementation of the settlement agreement and help former students, their families, and aboriginal communities embark on the path of healing and reconciliation by ensuring timely payments and health supports that are necessary.

The items I've described today, along with the other investments included in supplementary estimates (C), will help address a wide range of challenges and issues facing northerners and aboriginal peoples. These investments support our government's efforts to work toward collaborative, sustainable solutions that benefit all Canadians.

I know that this committee has recognized that there are a number of obstacles that prevent many aboriginal people and northerners from fully sharing in and contributing to Canada's prosperity. Supplementary estimates (C) will help remove some of those obstacles. Some are monetary, some are legislative, and some are policy.

My guess is that our discussions probably won't stick entirely to the supplementary estimates themselves, but will deal with the panoply of issues that I know this committee has been seized with. So I look forward to the questions specifically on the supplementary estimates, and on other issues as people would like to raise them.

Merci.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I know that your time may be limited here, so I think we'll go to questions from members now on your presentation. After you leave us we'll go to Ms. Jauvin. If that's acceptable to members, that's the way we'll proceed.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Bagnell.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Do you know how long the minister will be here? We might have to bring him back.

The Chair: Usually an hour is typical.

Minister, are you okay with staying for one hour from the time we began—4:30?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: It's almost 3:45 now, so can he stay until 4:40?

• (1540)

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Let's give her a whirl and—

The Chair: Let's see how we do. We'll do the best we can.

Let's begin now with questions from members. We will have a seven-minute round for each of the parties on the first round. Then we'll go through the normal routine motions and allocations as we agreed. It will be a five-minute round for both the question and the response, so please be judicious in your time to allow the minister to get his response out.

Let's go to Mr. Russell for seven minutes.

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

Good afternoon, Mr. Minister. It's good to have you with us again. I appreciate your comments, particularly with the fact that you're opening up the scope of any possible questions and subject matter that we can bring before you.

I know you discussed education in your remarks. I want to focus on a particular issue that has certainly been the matter of some attention for a lot of people over the last few months, and that is the

First Nations University. You have raised issues of accountability and transparency, and I believe that all members at this committee share your concerns. We know there have been challenges in the past, but I think it would be remiss not to say that there have also been some successes, like the over 3,000 graduates who have come out of the First Nations University, alumni like Perry Bellegarde, who ran for national chief and who was chief of the FSIN. And many others have become doctors and lawyers and have gone into almost every profession and made remarkable contributions to their communities and to Canada.

On the situation of accountability, there have been changes. I think you should agree that there have been some changes. There's been a change in the board of governors. There's been a change in the chief financial officer. There's been a sense and certainly a strong indication from the University of Regina that they are willing now to become involved in this, to provide administrative oversight, and to allow this institution to continue. So there have been changes. I think it would be wrong for anybody to make an assumption that there have been no changes, that even if it is a last-ditch effort, people are making a sincere effort to save this institution.

Is there any scenario, Minister, that you can envision that would allow First Nations University to continue, this unique and historical institution to continue, and to do some good work for first nations students? As you know, if the funding is cut off, it closes down. Some of those who are pursuing higher education now will not go back to pursue higher education. So I ask you this. Is there any scenario that you can envision that would keep First Nations University open after March 31 and allow it to pursue its goals and objectives?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Thank you, Mr. Russell.

Of course I think all of us feel badly about what's happened at First Nations University in a broad sense. It has been embroiled in turmoil, of course, over the last number of years, and some of that turmoil continues, although I grant you that some changes have been made.

I think it's important to note a couple of things. First of all, about 65% of the students who go to First Nations University receive funding directly from the federal government through our post-secondary programming, and that continues wherever those students are. It's not directed toward FNU; it's directed to the students themselves. It can be used—

Mr. Todd Russell: To be clear, the funding we're talking about is seven point whatever million out of their ISSP.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: No, I'm talking about the funding to the students directly.

Mr. Todd Russell: Yes, but to the institution, it comes out of the ISSP, right?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Right, but the funding that the students get directly continues. That continues whether they go to FNU or any other university.

When I met with the group the other day, the delegation that came from Saskatchewan, I pointed out a couple of things. First, even in Saskatchewan, probably 10% of the aboriginal students go to the FNU and 90% go elsewhere. And in the country, 95% of aboriginal students don't go to FNU; they go to all kinds of places across the country.

Mr. Todd Russell: But that's not the question, how many are going there. The point is, is there any way that you see that we can keep this institution going? Don't you see the value of the institution in and of itself, in terms of its goals and objectives?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: It's not a matter of whether I see a value in the institution. The problem right now is that there still isn't a plan on the table. I know there's a change in the governance. The last time we went through this, there were recommendations to completely overhaul the board. The FSIN got involved and said, "Okay, we'll completely overhaul the board". The board was completely overhauled. That was four years ago.

I've been through this so many times. I've asked them, "What's the proposal?" When I met with them the other day, I said, "Have you got a proposal that you can apply?", and Ms. Big Eagle, who was at the meeting, said that they are making preparations to work with the University of Regina. They hope to apply through the ISSP programming. I said, "That sounds good to me. If the university could apply, we would help in any way we could with the application forms or do some things through the ISSP programming." But what we're not interested in doing is funding. This is the same story you're going to get from the province: they're not prepared to fund the model that's there.

●(1545)

Mr. Todd Russell: I understand the model is changing.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Well, it's still not there. When they approached me the other day, they said they needed \$3.8 million for the next 60 days. I said, "But \$3.8 million is 50% of what we paid you all of last year, and that is for only 30 days into the new fiscal year." They said, "Well, yes, and then we'll need \$2 million a month for the rest of the year."

I said, "It's three times as much as we paid last year."

Mr. Todd Russell: With all due respect, it doesn't seem like there's a sincere effort, Mr. Minister, to keep this institution going. That's what I hear in your comments. You haven't outlined a scenario in which we would keep it going.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: That's not true.

Mr. Todd Russell: The Canadian Association of University Teachers, who were at one time very critical and censured, is onside, saying we must keep it open, and they're trying very diligently.

The University of Regina is there. Even the Province of Saskatchewan seems to be more open to allowing for this institution to survive for the benefit of students and communities.

I just wonder if there is something else we don't know about, that's not out there in the public purview, and that's keeping you from being supportive.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Without getting specific, I think there probably is. If you read the report from the CFO.... As you said, they've changed CFOs, but not willingly. The last guy got ballooned

when he blew the whistle on what was going on down there. He talked about abuses in the severance pay, abuses in the holiday pay, abuses in travel allowances, abuses in salary allocations, and he got fired for saying all this.

What I'm saying, Mr. Russell, is that there are ways it could be funded through the ISSP. There are 42 post-secondary institutions in Canada that deal with aboriginal people specifically, which apply through our regular programming. They can apply for that. I told them they can apply for that. I wished them success. We offered to help them with that.

That's how we help institutions. We're prepared to help, but we're not prepared to fund the FNU model, and neither is the province.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Russell and Mr. Minister.

Mr. Lemay now has the floor for seven minutes.

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): I want to thank you and your officials for being here, Mr. Minister. Your answer to the question put by my colleague, Mr. Russell, bodes well for the work we have planned for Tuesday, as we are supposed to discuss the First Nations University.

I do not want to go back to that topic as Mr. Russell has covered it for the time being. I have a few questions for you, and I hope I will have enough time to ask them.

First, page 137 of the Supplementary Estimates (C) reads as follows:

Vote 1: \$38,976,785 in total authorities is available: \$28,518,000 (...); \$4,792,000 from Vote 5 due to the deferral of the Indian Registry System (\$4,162,000 (...)).

Can we use that \$4 million when it comes time to implement Bill C-3, further to the McIvor ruling?

●(1550)

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl: That's not specifically about any funds that may be required under McIvor, although right now, with some border communities, we're engaged in an exercise for the secure status card.

Over the next number of years, it will apply to all first nations who are status Indians, and they will be able to acquire a secure status card. It won't happen all at once, but it will happen as we move forward. This money was set up as part of establishing the process of creating those secure cards in relationship with the Department of Homeland Security in the States and all of that.

It doesn't refer directly to McIvor, but it will refer to all status Indians, including those who are going to be registered under McIvor.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: I have a follow-up question, if I may. Mr. Minister, has anyone anywhere in your department done any assessments, and are you in the process of studying the impact of implementing the McIvor bill? Has money been earmarked for that? I did not see any funding in the supplementary estimates. Has funding already been allocated?

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl: No. We haven't earmarked money. I think you've been briefed on the process. We have the bill. We have the exploratory process that's going to deal with all the issues outside of McIvor. We also have an internal working committee that's going to examine the internal financial impact that will come from McIvor.

We have a working group. I can give you some names, which I can just now give you, because I just now have their contracts in place. The working group has been established. This is an oversight committee that will make sure that this work is done completely and accurately. The working group and the oversight committee is composed of David Emerson, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs; Ian Potter, former assistant deputy minister at Health Canada; Keith Martell, the executive chairman of the First Nations Bank of Canada; and Bill Austin, former assistant secretary at the Treasury Board.

The internal committee will be set up to oversee an internal working group, because the working group will have to include not only my department but also Health Canada and other federal departments, as necessary. This oversight committee, or this working group, including this group of folks I've hired to oversee this work, will look at the financial impact. It will try to give us a number and what it means not just to our department but to the federal government.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: We were all surprised, myself, my colleagues and almost everyone. We read in the throne speech and in the budget that the government planned to implement the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted by the UN General Assembly. One nothing for you.

But you say that the declaration will be implemented on the condition that it does not conflict with existing legislation and so forth.

Can you quickly tell us when the document will be signed? What are we doing in preparation for signing the document? What can we tell first nations about this?

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl: That's an excellent question. In fact, I met earlier today with another of the leaders of one of the national aboriginal organizations, which are part of the group. I've met now with two of them, so far. But I plan to meet with all the leaders of the national aboriginal organizations as a starting place to get their input on the best way we might support the declaration.

There are different opinions. Some people say that we should do it at the United Nations, because it's a UN declaration. Some say that it's a domestic issue, and we should do it here in Canada. Maybe we should do both. I don't know. I'm being open-ended. I want to work with them to get their input.

We have the example of Australia, which did what we're doing. They considered it for a period of time and then decided to support it. We have that precedent. Many aboriginal people said that it was done well. In the Canadian context, my guess is that we're going to hear from some people who are going to say that they want something in there that shows respect for the existing treaties. They're going to want something that says that this is an aspirational document that doesn't take away from other rights and privileges we've acquired through consultation and agreement.

It's important that I work with aboriginal leaders—not just first nations, but Inuit and other leaders—to make sure that we get that language right and get the process to do it right. Again, I'm open to suggestions on whether we do it here, internationally, or otherwise. I don't want to be prescriptive yet.

• (1555)

[Translation]

The Chair: Excellent.

Thank you, Mr. Lemay and Mr. Minister.

[English]

Now let's go to Ms. Crowder for seven minutes.

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

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

I'm going to ask four questions and then let you answer. For whatever you can't respond to today, perhaps you could supply the information.

The first question has to do with Jordan's Principle. I think you're probably well aware that in New Brunswick a report came out recommending that INAC and the province reach an agreement prior to September 1, 2010, on how to implement Jordan's Principle. New Brunswick has been musing about going to court to define their responsibilities and their liabilities.

So given what's pending there, what work will the department undertake to ensure that there are no gaps in services if the court defines New Brunswick's responsibilities as less than what they're currently delivering? There could be a gap between the federal and the provincial governments.

The second question I have is on the aboriginal financial institutions. I think you're probably well aware that the department's own report back on March 12, 2009, "Toward a New Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development", talked about the importance of the role of aboriginal financial institutions and said they should be enhanced. Yet when the loan loss reserve initiative was put out there, the AFIs were not invited to participate. Why were they left out of that process? How much money did the five players who were awarded the loan loss reserve actually loan out in the period that they've been responsible? That's question number two.

Question number three kind of bridges the supplementary estimates (C), the throne speech, and the budget speech. There was \$30 million announced for post-secondary education and I wonder if the Province of B.C.'s First Nations Education Act is going to be funded out of that \$30 million, because there have been ongoing negotiations about the funding, as you know.

My fourth question is around the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. I just think it's interesting that the money has been sunsetted, and although some organizations will continue to be funded until 2012, some will lose funding as of the end of March. Yet in the supplementaries, you indicate the need to continue funding the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, and there's new money in the new budget.

In a 2009 report that the department commissioned, it talked about the success of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. They were highly praised in that report. In fact, one of the recommendations was that the "Government of Canada should consider continued support for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation...". They note in this report that funding under Health Canada won't cut it, because they're not the same kinds of programs. So I wonder if you could indicate whether the government will consider implementing the recommendations from the evaluation that it commissioned.

Those are my questions.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Thank you. They're all good questions. I don't know if I'll get to them all, but let me take a stab at them in order.

Jordan's Principle, as you know, we've all supported in the House, so that's not in question. I think we can honestly say that the unfortunate profile that came out of Jordan's situation has been useful, in that it sensitized all levels of government to quit beating around the bush, but let's just get the services.

A tribute to everyone is that, by and large, it has been... I haven't seen any cases that have fallen through the cracks. Everybody's being careful to follow through on this, both federally and provincially. I fired off a letter to all provinces saying that we're committed to work on it, so let's get this done as quickly as we can.

The government is at varying stages of discussion with provinces right across the country. We met recently with the Province of New Brunswick and in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island on how we can work together to implement this. My hope is that we can get those details determined. I'm not sure if there's a September drop dead moment. I know there's a high degree of cooperation. Everybody wants to get the essence of this nailed down. I sense a high degree of cooperation right across the country.

So those discussions are taking place. I can't confirm that anything will happen by September for sure, but I'm confident that we're going to get it nailed down, because I find good faith in all corners and in every government. So I think we'll be able to do that and it's my hope that we'll be able to do it with New Brunswick as we will right across the country.

On the aboriginal financial institutions, you're right, they're tremendously important. I've spoken about them many times. When I talk about economic development, I always try to have a component on AFIs, because they are critically important.

The loan loss reserve initiative is basically a pilot project, as you know. This is pretty typical of what we do when we branch out and do something we haven't done before. We picked five institutions, including the First Nations Bank of Canada. They're bigger institutions dealing with bigger loan loss provisions in an attempt to pilot that at these five institutions to see how much success we would have and to see—

• (1600)

Ms. Jean Crowder: I'm sorry to interrupt, but the AFIs had been involved in discussions with INAC around a risk premium offset program, which is actually very similar to the loan loss reserve program. So it's curious to me that they've been involved in all of this discussion yet are excluded from piloting it. It would make sense with their track record to have them pilot.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: I guess you can argue both ways. But we know what the AFIs are particularly good at, and what they've been tremendously successful at is small and medium loans and coverage up to a certain amount. They have a lot of expertise in that and they've been very good at it.

Admittedly, though, some other institutions have other experience and other things they're also good at. So what the loan loss pilot project is about is to see whether that's the right way to go or not. It is only five institutions, it's not a pan-Canadian thing, and admittedly it is a pilot project. But the information we'll garner from that will tell us whether we should be looking at that model or another one. That's what a pilot project does, it gives you that information, and we'll get that feedback.

I don't have the dollar numbers on that in my notes, but we'll get back to you on the AFIs. Again, I have a lot of respect for them, and it may well be that we need to go back and beef them up going forward. I don't discount that at all. But we did need to explore, frankly, how we get the banks interested in lending money to aboriginal people. We need to find ways to encourage that. And increasingly, as our new aboriginal economic development framework talks about, there is a component of aboriginal financing that is out of the realm of what we used to consider par for the course.

It used to be that if a guy bought a gravel truck, he needed \$100,000, so he went to an AFI and we made the deal. Increasingly there's a smaller number, but a significant number, of big projects; these are mining projects, things that are done in the oil sands, things that are done on wind power, whereby they're talking about a billion dollars now. The AFIs may be the vehicle to go, but frankly I think we need to find a way to get the banks involved and interested and we need to get them to bite. We need to say how can we make sure that you're part of what we see is an exciting new part of the world, and that is big projects for first nations—not the gravel truck, but a billion-dollar wind farm.

So we piloted that in part to get them involved and also just to... Again, it's a pilot project, and we'll evaluate it. Admittedly, I'm not discounting that we may need to beef up the role of the AFIs as well. I'm not discounting that.

• (1605)

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

Now, on those other two questions—

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Maybe they'll come up too, but we'll get you....

The Chair: I know you and the department have been terrific in terms of getting back to some of these questions that linger, if we're not able to address them during the current meeting.

Let's move on to Mr. Duncan, for seven minutes.

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): Thank you very much, and I'll try not to ask four questions.

The budget has some very strong investments in child and family services and in education agreements. A lot of this was done under tripartite agreements. I wonder if you could talk about why those tripartite agreements are so important.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: A tripartite agreement... I've been delighted to sign quite a number of these, both on education and on child and family services right across the country. I think they're the way of the future, I really do. I just think to take advantage of some of that provincial expertise in service delivery.... They do a service delivery. They do it in many areas. The Constitution gives them jurisdiction in many of these areas, and they do it well. So not to take advantage of their expertise would be unwise, in my opinion.

In terms of these tripartite frameworks, if you will, that we've signed on child and family services, we've been able to not only fund and establish who looks after what but also who funds what. So on the funding that we've been able to put with those frameworks, this last year we signed agreements in Quebec and in Prince Edward Island, but we already had them established in Alberta, a significant one in Saskatchewan, and in Nova Scotia as well.

In every case we've been able to move from an apprehension model, where you just take kids out of the home when there's trouble, to a prevention-based model. It's what provinces did 15 years ago. We're 15 years behind the times. So by partnering with the province and with first nations, we're able to say, "Let's take advantage of the provincial expertise. They've already done this. They're good at it. They know how to make it work." And with first nations that say, "Yes, you might know how to make it work, but we have our own sensitivities on our reserves or in our communities", we make sure we dovetail that together. And we've been able to provide extra funds to make it all work. So that's a good example of how it works.

On education, as well.... I mentioned the one in Alberta that I signed earlier this year. I was there in June. I said in June that I'd like to see if we could get a tripartite agreement on education as soon as possible. That was in June of last year, and we negotiated that right down to the fine print and signed it off in February—done. People said we'd never do that with treaty first nations. These are the treaty groups in Alberta who called this historic. They equated it, in many

ways, as being as significant as the treaty. That's how important they saw this. For the first time ever, they felt like they were now included in the decision-making process. The provinces bought in. As the minister there, Minister Hancock, said, we're not fighting about jurisdiction; we're fighting about how to get those kids the best education possible. And that's a great fight to have.

As you know, we have that in New Brunswick, a tripartite agreement in B.C., the one in Alberta, as I mentioned, and others across the country that are increasing....

Do we have a letter of understanding or a memo in Manitoba?

Ms. Colleen Swords (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): In Manitoba and New Brunswick.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: And in New Brunswick.

Ms. Colleen Swords: Manitoba is a letter of understanding.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: We're making good progress on all of those. Increasingly, first nation leadership is saying that tripartites are a way forward. Whether with treaty or non-treaty first nations, let's try to scoop up some of that expertise that the province has. It's just been great.

Mr. John Duncan: At this point, would you say we are no longer the driver of the exercise—the partners are coming to us to request that they be next in the lineup?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Success breeds its own success, right? This is happening across the country. There is lots of interest, and of course some professional jealousy almost.

The only thing I want to say is that the model that works in one province might not work exactly the same way in the next. In B.C. we have a legislative model. That's the way it has gone. It's very advanced, very sophisticated, and it looks like it's great.

But the MOU we have in New Brunswick is different, in some ways, they might argue, even superior. So we just say that you don't have to have a cookie-cutter approach. If you want to do business with us in a tripartite agreement on education, we're all ears. It doesn't have to be like Manitoba or like B.C. If you have an idea on how we could do this working together.... And it's a little different in each place, but every one of them says the same thing. It's just a night and day difference when you get the province involved and the first nation helping to call the shots.

The first nations also say in their agreement...it's right down to, "What do we expect from the parents? What do we want from our leaders in our communities? What's the chief's responsibility? What about education boards? What about the federal government and their obligations and their treaty words, and such?" It's down to that kind of detail.

When the chiefs got excited about it they said they were going to go back to their communities and say, "If we're going to improve the education system, parents, it will never happen unless you buy in". And that's as important, in an education system, as the federal and the provincial governments and first nation governments themselves. But it's in that kind of detail that the success will be found. That's why the tripartite agreement focuses that attention not just on money—money isn't going to be important—but also on the structure of the education system itself. And I'm convinced tripartite agreements are the way forward.

• (1610)

Mr. John Duncan: I probably only have time for one more question.

I went to the aboriginal awards in Alberta sponsored largely by the Métis association, and once again I was reminded of the whole new relationship we have with the Métis. I wonder if you want to perhaps talk about what has transpired there and your role in making that happen.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: I have a feeling I'm going to get cut off here, so I'll just quickly say a couple of things.

One watershed moment working with Métis was the signing of the Métis Nation accord. When we signed that, in September 2008, it spelled out in a nation-to-nation relationship how we were going to work together with one another.

Then we set some achievable goals. I'll just say on the one we talked about, support for Métis veterans, that I'd never been over to Europe for the D-Day celebrations, and I went this year on November 11. I must say that to see those Métis veterans and the Red River cart was one of the finest moments.

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

Now we are going to the second round. This will be for five minutes now, and we are going to Mr. Bagnell first.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Thank you.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

Like Ms. Crowder, I'm going to ask questions on three areas, and if you could commit to get back in writing to the committee on anything you don't have time to answer, that would be great.

First, as I'm sure you are aware—you have to be—there is outrage across the country that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has been closed, that it is not continuing. It is not being extended. I have four projects in my own riding: Liard Aboriginal Women's Society; CAIRS, the Committee on Abuse in Residential Schools Society; Kwanlin Dun First Nation; and Northern Tutchone Tribal Council. CAIRS has 133 projects and organizations that are well set up across the country. I know the one in my riding sees thousands of people, so

if you take thousands times 133.... Anyone who thinks healing is finished is dreaming in technicolor.

Who would know better than the people in the Minister of Health's own riding? They, a few minutes ago, tabled in their legislature a motion.

WHEREAS the loss of these programs would represent a significant setback for community-driven wellness and healing and would threaten the viability of community support programs that have been developed over the past decade; NOW THEREFORE I MOVE, seconded by the Member for Quttiktuq, that the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut calls on the Government of Canada to fully reinstate the funding to the programs and services provided under the Aboriginal Healing Foundation which support Nunavummiut.

The second area I want to talk about is food mail. Through last year's estimates we see it was \$66 million. This year's budget says they are adding \$22.5 million per year for two years to bring the program total down to 60,000 people. But as we know, we need more money. There are a lot more aboriginal people. The cost of food has gone up. The evaluation that you talked about had some good suggestions of how it has to be extended. People want it extended and improved. In fact, in this year's main estimates it goes all the way down to 47,600 people. So I want a commitment that it is actually going to go up rather than down, as it says in the budget.

My last question is related to CanNor, of which we are all proud. It's great to see Ms. Jauvin here. It sort of has a slight in the budget. The regional development corporations are only mentioned in the budget on page 84, where it talks about new innovation programs. They are all mentioned: ACOA, CEDQ, and WED. The only ones not mentioned are CanNor and FedNor. Unless you can explain otherwise, it suggests that people in the north aren't capable of innovation. We get this new agency and it's not supported like the others are. It's like a step backward just after it started.

Could the minister address those issues? I know he has heard of some of these from constituents across the country.

• (1615)

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Thank you.

What we don't get to, we'll answer in written form, or you may have time to ask the officials later.

I have nothing but good things to say about the Aboriginal Healing Foundation as well. It has done good work. It was established many years ago. We gave it \$125 million and a five-year mandate three years ago, and there is still money left in the Aboriginal Healing Foundation budget. They tabled the report here in the House of Commons a week or so ago.

We tabled the report, and in their annual report they talk about the details of how they will wind down the organization while still providing a level of services over the next couple of years. They will have a dozen major healing centres open across the country. They will continue to provide a series of services. These will not be as extensive as in the past, but some of the services they had in the system. It will be a reduced level of service over the next couple of years.

At the same time, of course, we did announce increased funding for Health Canada in the budget. There is another \$66 million over two years in this budget, specifically for the Indian residential school resolution health support program.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: I'm sorry, but that's not an increase. That's a decrease. The health officials told us at committee this morning they had \$39 million a year, and that's \$33 million a year you just announced as an increase, so that's a decrease to Health Canada. If they're going to have more people to heal, then closing the healing foundation and giving them less money to heal is not a help. That's what the health officials said at committee this morning.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: I can't speak for Health Canada. I'm just talking about what's in the budget, \$66 million over two years—

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Yes, which is \$33 million a year, and they said that last year it was \$39 million.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: I'm not accepting that, and I'm not in the health department, so I can't speak to the health department's overall budget. For example, the food mail numbers you just talked about there are not accurate. What we put in as a notional budget of \$66 million last year, after you put all the supplementary money into it and so on, this year they will spend around \$60 million. They won't spend \$66 million, it will be \$60 million that it will come in at. The money that we are allocating is in the budget and it brings us up to \$60 million. Importantly, instead of—

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Down to \$60 million.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: It brings us up to \$60 million. It doesn't force us to go back to supplementaries every year. This is now the program. It used to be the program was \$25 million, plus you had to go to supplementaries every year, as you know. This has been going on for ten years.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Pardon me, but it's—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Bagnell, your time is over.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: It's \$60 million a year.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: The mains don't resemble—

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Bagnell, you're finished.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: It's \$60 million.

The Chair: What we're going to do there, there was a question to Ms. Jauvin, and perhaps once we get into the second stage here, Ms. Jauvin, we'll come back to that. If you have an opportunity to think about that in the meantime, maybe you could address that in your opening comments.

Now let's go to Mr. Dreeshen for five minutes. Mr. Dreeshen, go ahead.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. We're pleased to have all your departmental officials here as well.

First of all, I wanted to start by just congratulating your department on having reduced the number of high-risk first nation water systems from 193 down to 44, as you mentioned in your speeches, as well as reducing those 21 communities that were in especially difficult times down to four. A lot of effort has been taken, and I certainly appreciate it, and I'm sure the people in those communities do as well.

I was encouraged, as I'm sure all of the members of our committee were, when we were having our hearings in Whitehorse last fall, listening to some of the leaders of the communities. I know I've gone home and I've mentioned to people that there were a lot of CEOs who you wouldn't have minded having in your own company south of 60 because of the talent we saw there. I know just a couple of weeks ago, I, along with some committee members, was at the aboriginal finance officers' presentations, and I was fortunate enough to be sitting with Deanna Hamilton at the time, who was the award winner from the First Nations Finance Authority. When I was listening to her about the types of things they were doing in their community, as well as the other leaders who were there, I was extremely impressed with the talent that is there.

For my questions, could you perhaps expand somewhat on some of these issues, like the water systems, housing, schools? I'm interested in that, plus the infrastructure that is taking place. Also, could you update us on how our economic action plan has been working on reserves?

● (1620)

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Okay. Thank you.

Of course, in the action plan there's a reserve component and an off-reserve component as well. Whenever you get a big dollop of money for infrastructure investment it takes a lot of the pressure out of the system. There's significant investment every year from the department in new infrastructure and infrastructure management or maintenance. But the economic action plan allowed us to announce a dozen major school projects, and 12 or 14 major water and wastewater projects. There has been a lot of construction, housing construction, and so on. So all of those things are valuable.

It's not a sleeper issue because it's right front and centre in the Speech from the Throne. But in addition to the important investments—and there's \$1.4 billion in additional investment under the action plan, so it's significant—one of the things I'm excited about is the line in the Speech from the Throne that talks about the need to examine new ways of managing the financing of first nations infrastructure, aboriginal infrastructure.

One of the things we do year in and year out is cash manage infrastructure based on the vagaries of.... You know, you get a fire over in one area, you run out of money in another area. It's that bad. And it's all done on a cash basis. Moving forward, the Speech from the Throne said that we need to come up with other models that allow us to lever the money we get, which is something I've been pushing for.

In a sense I feel it's a shame. We're the only organization in Canada, probably in the modern world.... The provinces don't do this, and municipalities don't do this. But under our current authorities, if we get \$200 million and we say we can build ten schools, that's what we can build. If you gave \$200 million to the province they'd say, "Ah, we can build \$1 billion worth of schools with that", because a school doesn't wear out in one year.

So all these investments are making improvements and doing good work. But in the long term, working with outfits like the First Nations Finance Authority, they want to use own-source revenue and property revenue to finance infrastructure on reserve, or use the P3 model we have in the finance department on reserve, or simply get away from a cash basis to a regular infrastructure financing method. Think of the impact we could have if first nations could access that. Everybody else considers this just normal routine business. But we have to go to first nations and say, "No, if you can't pay for it 100% cash you can't have it".

So that line in the Speech from the Throne—and I'm sure lots of people just turned the page and went on—is one of the most significant things I'd like to work on this year. We need to fix how we finance infrastructure so that first nations can do what everybody else can do in this country. Then a lot of the shortages, the maintenance, and the sense of ownership would swing from the way we do it now—almost like you roll the dice you get a school, you roll the dice you don't get a school—to asking them, "How would you like to manage the long-term infrastructure needs in your community?" I bet you'd like to manage it like any municipality or authority can. You wouldn't do it based on the cashflow that came in today. You would say, "I have a long-term plan and here's how I'm going to do it".

If we can do that, it will be the single biggest significant change in infrastructure management that has been seen in this department in a lifetime.

•(1625)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Dreeshen, thank you very much.

Now, we continue with Mr. Lévesque, the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

Mr. Lévesque, you have five minutes.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Minister, you already have a good idea of one of the three questions that I have for you. Good afternoon to everyone who is with you, including Ms. Jauvin, who was not there when we visited Nunavik.

Mr. Minister, this is separate from the question I asked you in the House about the food mail program. Three years ago, we suggested that the pilot project be implemented in all the communities. The cost of doing that was fairly high but minimal when compared with the cost of maintaining Canada's roads. In fact, it cost approximately \$600 million to implement the pilot project in all the communities.

Currently, in announcements regarding the budget, you plan to reduce the number of gateways for the core program only, from 20 to 5 gateways. The only study we were allowed to see is a bit contradictory and should be considered with caution.

Can you tell me whether you are able to put together a program within a timeframe that you can share with us today? As a committee, can we obtain feedback from the various stakeholders so that we can give you suggestions even before a final report is released?

In terms of housing in Nunavik, 1,000 units are needed. This week, we found out that you negotiated with Quebec and have agreed on 340 housing units. Internationally, we have a very poor reputation when it comes to Inuit and first nations housing.

Have you earmarked money for Kitcisakik? In fact, last summer, I invited you to meet with the people of Kitcisakik. I was even willing to stay in the background if you felt that my presence was undesirable. Can you tell me whether, in your current budget, you have allocated money that could apply to Kitcisakik?

Those are my three questions. Since you have no problem expressing yourself, I will let you go. And, I would like you to answer in French, as promised.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: I can try to answer you in French, but since the issues are very complex, I may end up declaring war on another country before this discussion is over, by accident. So I don't want to do that.

The problems in Kitcisakik are indeed serious. But we have a good relationship with the Quebec government. Discussions and negotiations between the communities, the province of Quebec and our government are ongoing. There is a small project now with...

[English]

I am going to have to go to English or I'll be all day on this. I am sorry.

Regarding Young Musicians of the World, for example, you talked to me about that project. We were able to get a little bit of money in there.

But there is a bigger issue at stake, quite a big issue with Kitcisakik, and we need to work with the Province of Quebec to find the proper location for the community, set the priorities in place, and make it happen. It needs to be a joint project between the community itself, our government, and the Province of Quebec, because some of it is going to be provincial, some of the access issues, and so on.

It has proven to be very difficult. The community doesn't have a lot of capacity, in many ways. So it's very nervous about saying what it wants to do and sticking to a plan, because they're very cautious. I think it's really a capacity issue. But we have good discussions, I think, with the government and we hope to be able to see good progress this year.

On the housing in Nunavik, we were able to sign an agreement yesterday. That is the obligation we had under the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. We were able to renew the five-year agreement on the Nunavik housing agreement, with an escalator. They got 15% more than the last agreement, which is good. There's always need for more, but it was good to see that.

We also transferred last year \$600 million, I think it was, to Quebec for social housing generally. So where the Province of Quebec uses that \$600 million is up to them. The federal government has significant investments in social housing. I can't speak to that. I don't know exactly where that goes, but it is a significant transfer.

I was just given this, that the department has recently confirmed that it will finance the construction of a new elementary school for Kitecsakik for kindergarten to grade six. So there is progress.

We are working well with the minister there in Quebec. We both have that real concern for those people, and yes, I do consider them important people.

• (1630)

The Chair: We do have to end it there.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: On your final question, I will have to get back to you on the food mail, but we don't have a program to announce today. We'll do it in writing. But certainly what was spelled out in the Speech from the Throne is that we do need a new program. We've consulted broadly with airline companies, with aboriginal groups, with retailers, with people throughout the system, and with Canada Post, and we have tried to hear what works and what doesn't and tried to come up with a workable plan.

So we've done that, but I don't have an announcement today. There isn't anything to announce yet, other than I'm expected to bring that forward quickly.

The Chair: Minister, time-wise, are you okay for another question or two?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: I'm going to have to vamoose here pretty quickly. I have probably five more minutes.

The Chair: All right, let's take five more minutes.

We'll go to Mr. Clarke, and then we'll proceed in the same order of questioning that we have currently and we'll get to Mr. Martin.

Sorry we couldn't get there, but we have to follow the list.

Mr. Clarke.

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

Thank you, Minister Strahl, for coming in today.

Being from a first nation myself and watching the 2010 Olympics and seeing the participation of the first nations, aboriginals across

Canada, I think that was paramount in bringing Canada together more.

We see the Paralympics taking place as well, and the participation of first nations communities. My foster brother is from one of the communities that participated in the opening ceremonies in Vancouver, B.C.

I am experiencing quite a bit of pride. I never actually got to go to Vancouver, but watching the opening ceremonies and seeing the participation of the first nations I think gave the world a different perspective of first nations and how proud a culture we have. With the music, the hospitality, and the culture that was showcased in Vancouver, the world got to see an aspect of specifically Vancouver in the light of participation and how closely the communities can work together even though we all come from different backgrounds.

With the four first nation communities in Vancouver, what type of legacy has been left as a result of the Olympics and Paralympics?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: That's a great question. I was there when the torch came in. The torch ended up at the aboriginal pavilion. That was its final spot before it went into the stadium, and I was there with the four host first nations when the torch came in. I don't know if it's the right expression or not, but I thought they were going to pop all the buttons on their vests.

They were so proud, and understandably so, of the part they played. It was not only at the Olympics, of course. The torch had gone through more than 100 aboriginal communities across the country. We helped to pay for an aboriginal youth gathering that brought kids in from all across the country. They were part of the opening ceremonies. They did leadership training and so on that went with it.

As you mentioned, the four host first nations did a spectacular job of integrating not only the west coast culture, but.... I think people, whether it was Inuit carvings and culture or food.... Different days of the pavilion had different food, different emphasis, and so on. It was really spectacular. I think we all felt that as Canadians.

I was particularly proud for the aboriginal people, who I think felt for the first time that they were included. Not only were they included in the proposal to host the Olympics and in the planning for the Olympics, but they actually hosted the Olympics. What a change from what both of us probably grew up on. It's quite a change in attitude.

Each of the four host first nations ended up with a significant legacy fund. We helped pay for certain things in each of the four host first nations to help them take advantage of the economic opportunities. It was a little different in each of the communities, but certainly there was an economic emphasis in all of them, both on promotion of tourism and on economic development opportunities. I think some \$50 million or \$60 million in aboriginal procurement happened during the games.

We funded everything from people to help with tourism aspects to.... Anything we could do to help, basically, we rolled out to try to maximize that. As Tewanee Joseph said when he welcomed people there, when the torch finally came in, he just said it was.... Everything had been done top-notch. They feel it's been a launch for opportunities. Again, it was one of those watershed moments, an opportunity for them to host the world and show the world what they're all about.

For example, the Squamish First Nation has \$1 billion worth of development on the books now. The other communities, whether Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, or Lil'wat, are all thinking about world-class, big opportunities for aboriginal people. Tewanee Joseph was a wonderful spokesperson, but the message you'll get from all the chiefs there as well is "If we can host the world, then surely we can overcome whatever problems we have here in Canada and show the world we can do this, not just during the Olympic year but non-stop". It's going to be a great legacy, not just for the four host first nations but I think for aboriginal people across the country.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clarke.

Minister, thank you again for coming and spending a little bit of extra time with us here today. I know there were a couple of items for follow-up, and as I say, your department's always great about getting back to us on that.

We know we have a bill that will be here at some point in the not too distant future. I'm sure we'll have you back as our opening witness for that. We wish you well for the rest of your afternoon and for the weekend.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: *Merci.* Thank you very much.

The Chair: We'll take a two-minute suspension, members, and then we'll resume immediately after.

• _____ (Pause) _____

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• (1640)

The Chair: Okay, members. We'll continue.

I've invited Ms. Jauvin. We really just had the minister prepared with opening comments today, but since the deputy minister for the agency is here with us today, perhaps we'll hear some opening comments, and then we'll go directly to the same questioning list that we had originally.

I have Ms. Crowder up next. Let's go with just a few opening comments, if you will, and then we can pick up those other questions at the same time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Jauvin (Deputy Minister and President, Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency): I did not prepare any remarks separate from those of the minister. At CanNor, we have made what I would call considerable progress.

[*English*]

I think you will recall our priorities from the get-go—you may not recall, but I certainly recall—and the first one was we needed to ensure we were delivering, that there was a smooth transition in the

program delivery, and we've continued to do that. I can go into a little bit more detail perhaps later on in the question period with respect to some of the progress we've made on our programs.

I'm proud to say that in this first year, a transition year, we've committed 98% of our funding, and we anticipate we will have spent 80% of it in this fiscal year. So that's something we were very focused on and I'm very pleased to say we've accomplished. We're also busy setting up the agency. Essentially all the foundation pieces are either in place or about to be in place, and our report on plans and priorities has been tabled through the minister and we're very pleased with that.

We also have an integrated business plan, which we are starting to put the final touches to. It's a three-year plan, which will drive our business over the next while.

We also have an HR strategy, which is especially important for CanNor because we want to be very representative of the people we serve, so we have the strategy and we're starting to implement it.

We have a plan to move. The headquarters are established in Iqaluit, but we need to move more people there over time, and that is of course dependent on having accommodation in Iqaluit. Those of you who visited Iqaluit last fall will know that, first of all, accommodation is very tight and we are now sharing with INAC, but we do have a request for a proposal for appropriate accommodation for CanNor headquarters over the next little while and we're hoping to have results. This is all managed by Public Works.

We also had undertaken to launch the northern project management office as soon as possible. This is going to be launched in the coming weeks, as we undertook to do. We're very excited about this, because we think there's potential for this project management office to really make a difference, first of all, to proponents who are trying to navigate the regulatory system in terms of all the permits and the environmental steps they have to go through with respect to their projects. Having situated this office at CanNor allows us to, wearing our economic development hat, see what linkages we could make in terms of economic development and how we can make economic development opportunities available to communities in the context of these projects. So that is happening in the next little while.

The last thing is we have been working really hard to build relationships across the north. As I was saying the last time, Michel, my vice-president, and I were both new to the north, so we needed to build relationships, but we're very thankful that most of the staff across the regional offices are northerners and have been established in the north for a long time, so they had great working relationships with people in the north and that has been very helpful to us. So we're continuing to build these relationships.

We're also building linkages into the federal government, because we realize we may have a certain amount of money to spend, which we're happily spending, but we need to ensure that we take advantage of the fact that the federal government as a whole is spending quite a bit of money in the north. So our role is to ensure that we can develop opportunities based on all this other funding that's being committed in the north and ensure that our agency can help communities, help territorial governments, aboriginal and Inuit groups take advantage not only of our spending, but the spending of the federal government as a whole across the north.

• (1645)

This capacity is something we need to develop, but I think that potentially we can have a very powerful impact.

I will stop there. Sorry.

The Chair: No, there's no need to apologize. That was a good update.

Ms. Nicole Jauvin: It's exciting work, and it's hard to stop once you start talking. I apologize.

The Chair: Of course.

Let's go to Ms. Crowder now, for five minutes, followed by Mr. Rickford and then Mr. Martin.

Go ahead, Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you.

I want to come back to the question I asked the minister about the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

In the supplementary estimates, under the major specific initiatives, it says:

The number of students claiming sexual and/or serious physical abuse and the severity of abuse has proved to be much higher than initially estimated, resulting in total projected payments in 2009-10 to exceed the \$160 million annual allocation.

We know that in the subsequent budget, additional money was allocated around the payout of Indian residential school settlement money. The 2009 report that the department commissioned acknowledged that research has shown that it takes ten years of continuous healing efforts before a community is securely established in healing from the Indian residential school trauma. The report goes on to say that in some communities, in particular in the Inuit projects, the healing process was delayed due to the later start of the age of projects for Inuit.

It seems the government acknowledges that more people are applying for payment or getting payment through the dispute resolution process, that the department's own evaluation of the programs indicated that they are successful, that there were some delayed starts, and that the healing needs to continue. That report also indicates that the Health Canada support programs are designed to provide specific services that are complementary to, but different from, those of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

What steps will the department take to ensure that there are no serious gaps or implications for these communities that have already started on a healing journey and are going to see funds withdrawn? In fact, just to close, in the AHF's report that the minister mentioned,

which was tabled in the House, 23% of the projects estimate that they are not going to be able to continue to function without the money and another 56% are unsure of their future.

In light of the apology and the recognition that payments are still needed, what steps are you taking to ensure that there are no serious repercussions for communities?

• (1650)

Ms. Colleen Swords: Could I ask if the report you're referring to is the evaluation of the work?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Yes. That's the evaluation for the period of April 2007 to 2009, and it was commissioned by the department.

Ms. Colleen Swords: Right.

I think the report indicates that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation does a lot of good work. There's no question about that, and we certainly thank them for it.

The original intention for the funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation for matters related to the residential schools was that it would be somewhat time-limited. The obligation that we have in the settlement agreement relates to providing assistance and emotional and mental health supports. Our expectation is that the existing facilities that Health Canada provides will be able to provide that help and support to those who may need it.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I'm sorry to interject, but how do you know that? You're making an assumption. Your own document indicates Health Canada's services are not the same as those of AHF.

Ms. Colleen Swords: That's a document produced by evaluators and provided to the department, so in effect it's a judgment that they have provided. It's not ours—

Ms. Jean Crowder: But how do you know that Health Canada's services are going to pick up the slack?

Ms. Colleen Swords: Well, Health Canada did get additional funds in the budget. They got an additional \$65.9 million over two years.

Ms. Jean Crowder: But again, obviously there's some dispute on whether those numbers are sufficient. I want to know what the evidence is. Where is the evidence that what you're proposing is going to fill the gap when these healing centres close? What's the evidence that you've based your decision on?

Ms. Colleen Swords: The healing centres themselves won't be closing right away. The 12 healing centres across the country will continue.

Ms. Jean Crowder: But the projects will close.

Ms. Colleen Swords: It's specific projects that were funded. Not all of the projects are funded entirely by the federal government. Some of them obtain funding from other organizations. So that will be the question in the first instance: can they find and locate funding elsewhere? But the second thing is that Health Canada got additional funds in the budget—it's in the budget documents—and they will be making sure that the necessary emotional and mental supports are provided.

The program is about halfway through now; it's not at its initial phase. Things are not at the point where everything still has to be done. It is partway through.

So that is the plan and that's the expectation: that Health Canada will be able to assist, that the aboriginal healing centres themselves continue. So it's just really the project funding.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Swords.

Before we go to Mr. Rickford, I also want to recognize Madame Marie-José Bourassa,

[*Translation*]

who is the Director General, Corporate Services, and Chief Financial Officer.

[*English*]

It's great to have you here today. Thank you very much.

Let's go to Mr. Rickford for five minutes.

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

This is a question about the funding for the north—obviously coming above 60 degrees north, even though my own riding is pretty north and borders the north. This 2010 budget is really part two of Canada's economic action plan rolled out in 2009 and is having tremendous success across Canada but has particularly benefited ridings with vast space and needed infrastructure, in the wake of more than a decade of, in my view—

• (1655)

Mr. Todd Russell: Darkness.

Mr. Greg Rickford: —okay, of darkness, to steal the words of my colleague.

Thank you.

My understanding is that the more than \$600 million in funding to the north included support for CanNor Regional Economic Development Agency. Housing was identified as a priority and also key Arctic research facilities.

Could you provide a bit more or a breakdown of this funding than what I've identified?

Ms. Colleen Swords: The department puts out a report, which we've been putting out every quarter, that indicates the total investments under the economic action plan for aboriginals and northerners. It's not just for the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development; it's for all departments, because there are some programs—for example RInC—that are run by other departments.

I think the best thing to do would be to offer to provide you with a copy of that report. We know it has made a big difference in the opportunity to advance some projects in the north. For example, on environmentally contaminated sites, we've been able to move up and advance some of the rectifications of these. We've been able to fund some money for small science and research programming and projects that are done throughout the north. It has really made a big difference. The RInC program as well has been important.

I think I might turn to my colleague, Nicole Jauvin, and ask her to explain what a difference it has made for CanNor. But I will provide a copy of that report. We're just finalizing the last quarter's report; it

gives you, for the whole government, what's being done for the north.

Ms. Nicole Jauvin: Thank you, Colleen.

I would say that it hasn't made a difference for CanNor. Hopefully it has made a difference for northerners.

Of the programs you are referring to, in particular from a CanNor perspective we were administering two: the community adjustment fund and the recreational infrastructure Canada fund. We have committed both of them in their entirety for this fiscal year. We funded 149 projects.

For example, under the community adjustment fund alone, 265 person-years of employment were created. What we call the RInC program, which is much smaller, has still created or maintained another 29 person years of employment in the three territories.

Both of these programs have been extremely well subscribed, and we are seeing direct impact of these funds flowing into the territories.

The Chair: You have time for a quick question.

Mr. Greg Rickford: No, that's fine.

Ms. Colleen Swords: If I may add one thing I just noticed in my notes respecting the projects that relate to Arctic research, it's 20 projects that we're funding at 37 sites across the north. This has really made a big difference.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rickford.

Now we'll go to Mr. Russell for five minutes. This is the last indication that someone has a question, so we may wrap up with this and then move to committee business, unless someone else puts their name on the list.

Let's go to Mr. Russell, for five minutes.

Mr. Todd Russell: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll follow up on the minister's notes and subsequent questions that were asked.

On the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the government's change of heart on that particular item of business, can we get something in writing from the department about how they are going to approach the implementation of this UN declaration? The minister outlined some things they were considering—talks with national aboriginal leaders—but then he was talking about whether this should be implemented nationally or at the UN.

Can the department provide us with a bit more detail about the approach you're going to take on that particular item of business?

Ms. Colleen Swords: I think we can provide some indication of options and possibilities. I don't think it has all been finally decided yet.

The declaration isn't an international treaty that you sign. It's a declaration, which was like a vote in the UN, that took place several years ago. You can't go back and sign now or re-vote.

So we have to decide how it is that we're going to record the endorsement. For example, in Australia they did it through a speech from the minister of indigenous affairs that was done at a ceremony in Parliament to which people were invited. We could do that. You could decide you're going to do it at the UN. There's a whole series of options.

•(1700)

Mr. Todd Russell: Just let us know what you're thinking on it, so that we'll have a better sense—

Ms. Colleen Swords: We'll get you something, but whether it's the final decision.... They're just options now.

Mr. Todd Russell: I'm sure it won't be the final. It's always open to change. But I would appreciate something on it.

I don't believe we should underestimate the importance of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. The minister says he's cutting funding to the First Nations University because it hasn't been accountable or transparent and may not be delivering results. But the same argument can be used that he's cutting funding or not renewing funding to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, when it is transparent, is accountable, and does produce results.

I guess you can use either example: a cut is a cut. But can your department provide us with an analysis of the impacts? I know we may have a study on this as well, but can your department provide us a study of what the impacts would be on survivors, on the healing options that will be available to individuals and communities? As my colleague asked, has there been a gap analysis done? How is it going to be filled?

I don't believe anybody in this room feels that the healing process is complete. For some it's starting, some may be midway through, and others may have dealt with various issues.

Can this be provided? Is that work being undertaken?

Ms. Colleen Swords: I think we would have to speak with Health Canada as well, because of course they play an important role in this.

If you're talking about healing, there are many aspects to it. In some cases, actually having your case heard before a tribunal is part of the healing. The truth and reconciliation commission process can

Mr. Todd Russell: It can also be more traumatic and require additional healing.

Ms. Colleen Swords: —also be part of the healing.

We would have to check with Health Canada, because that's a very important part to your question.

Mr. Todd Russell: I have one other very quick question, if that's okay, Mr. Chair.

This comes from our analysts' looking at the supplementary estimates. "Family violence shelter services" is mentioned. I would refer you to page.... You probably don't have it with you, but page 85 mentions that \$15 million is being provided to provinces to support their "budget increases for family violence shelter services, provincially billed income assistance payments and education payments and school construction".

There are four questions. Can you provide the answers in writing to us at some point? The questions are as follows.

Please provide a detailed breakdown of the intended use of this funding for each of the above-mentioned initiatives.

It is said that in the 2009-10 Report on Plans and Priorities, the opening of five new family violence shelters by March 2011 was indicated. Are you going to meet that target?

How is the department working with the provinces in general to ensure that ongoing improvements in social services to aboriginal peoples are maintained?

There are three of the four questions. Could answers be provided to us?

Ms. Colleen Swords: I'll just check with my colleague, Peter Traversy. I'm sorry, I failed to introduce him. He is the acting chief financial officer for the department right now. I'll see if he can answer your question about the exact amount of money. I'll just get you the information. I'll check in my book for the information on the shelters.

Mr. Peter Traversy (Acting Chief Financial Officer, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): In terms of the \$15 million that has been reinvested in education and social billings, I have a breakdown here. This relates to the page 85 reference of \$15 million. Of the total, \$9.7 million was used to address provincial billings for social development and income assistance. It was \$7.5 million for Manitoba and \$2.2 million for Alberta. A total of \$1.5 million relates to family violence and prevention due to provincial increases and shelter costs in Alberta. There is \$2.5 million to address provincial billings for elementary and secondary education in Manitoba and \$1.3 million to offset costs related to increased school construction costs in the Atlantic region. That's how those funds were utilized.

Mr. Todd Russell: Thank you, sir.

The Chair: Okay, we're out of time. I have a request for another question for the witnesses. It's outside of the order.

Does anyone else have a question they'd like to put?

Okay, that being a no, we'll go to Mr. Bagnell for a short question, because we're going to try to get on with some committee business, as well.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: I have two short questions, actually. One is related to CanNor. In the main estimates or in this budget, is there anything new that we aren't aware of? I don't mean things like community adjustments and the other programs that were transferred over. Is there anything new that we hadn't heard of before, in particular?

•(1705)

Ms. Nicole Jauvin: Do you mean in these supplementaries?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: No, I mean in the new main estimates.

Ms. Nicole Jauvin: No.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Okay. I have another question.

A constituent wrote to me and talked about a number of adaptation projects related to climate change programs that are scattered over a number of federal departments. He wanted to know, now that those were expiring, if there were replacement programs. You probably can't answer this now, but I wonder if you could endeavour to get back to the committee on that.

Ms. Nicole Jauvin: Absolutely. I will undertake to do that. We'll look into that.

Would you like an answer to your question to the minister with respect to the other regional development agencies? Of course, I'm not going to speak for them. I'll just state that apparently, these are renewals to core funding programs they already had. An equivalent would be that for CanNor, in budget 2009, under SINED, which was renewed for another five years, there is an innovation and knowledge provision. This is, I would venture to say, the rough equivalent of this. And this was renewed in budget 2009 for CanNor in the north.

The Chair: Okay, thank you, Mr. Bagnell.

Did you have something else you wanted to add, Ms Swords?

Ms. Colleen Swords: I just might answer the question on the shelters. We had funding for an additional five, to bring us up to 41 across the country. The new shelters are now finished and are open in Alberta and Quebec, and the other three are still being finished. But we'll give you a full answer.

The Chair: Before I let you go, you mentioned, Miss Jauvin, that there were about 20 projects, in total, that you referenced under, I think, the RInC program. We're also doing a study on northern economic development, as you know. It would be helpful if you could give us a list of those, just so we can perhaps append that to our work on the north. That would be helpful.

Ms. Nicole Jauvin: In fact, I'd volunteer to give you a list of all our projects, if that would be of interest to you. There are 149 of them. I'll give them in caucus, and you can decide what to do with them.

The Chair: Okay, fantastic. If you could follow up, we'd appreciate that.

Okay, we'll let you go. Thank you very much, witnesses.

Because of the time constraints here, members, we're not going to take a recess. Let's just continue.

We have two motions that have come before us. One is from Ms. Neville. I note that Ms. Neville is not able to....

Mr. Todd Russell: Defer the motion.

The Chair: You want to defer the motion? Is that okay? Okay, let's do that. So what happens is that this motion will just stay, and we'll bring it up at a later meeting when Ms. Neville is here or whenever one of her colleagues might wish to move it.

The second motion is from Mr. Bagnell.

Mr. Bagnell, did you want to speak to the motion at this point?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Just before I do, can I ask a brief point-of-order question? How come this meeting wasn't televised?

The Chair: That's a good question. As you know, we're under pretty compact timelines here. We did seek to get a room with a televised format. There was no room available, so we chose to go without. That's the simple answer.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Okay. That's fine.

Ms. Jean Crowder: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, just about our meeting on Tuesday and it being three hours, I now understand that we're going to have a substantial number of votes on Tuesday because we have to vote—

An hon. member: Three votes.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: —on the estimates.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Yes, the estimates, so where do we build that in? I don't know how long it's going to take.

The Chair: The idea would be that we have the second part of the meeting after the vote. We'll run for as long as we can, until 5:15, break for the votes, and then return here for the second part of the meeting. Okay?

We'll go back to Mr. Bagnell.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Thank you.

I'm an easy guy to get along with, so I don't mind amending my motion. I just want to give you the intent behind it. As you probably heard in my question, and as some of you may have heard from constituents, there's a lot of really good work going on.

As the minister said, there's a little bit of residue money left, so some projects will go ahead, but a number of projects are closing. I know, because they phoned us specifically. They're doing good work, as the minister said. He had nothing but praise for them. Some of them are going to be closing on March 31, as you may have seen in the media.

As you know, once you get something up and running but you close it down, people go to other jobs and you lose the continuity. Some of these people are pretty desperate. They're not going to go into a government office or a fancy hotel meeting room. These organizations are kind of special. They're often run by aboriginal people, by people they trust, and people go in and get some basic services.

As I said, I'm not stuck on the wording, but my intent is to somehow get the funds so these people can carry on, so these good projects can carry on. As I said, the statistics show that there are thousands of people involved, just in one of my projects. That's out of 133 in the country. So this involves tens of thousands of people who still need the healing somehow, healing that they can't get elsewhere. There are no other real provisions for it.

Health Canada has always provided some services. That's good. I applaud the government for that. Those services are going to continue, and I applaud the government for that, but they're certainly not at all serving the same need, financially or technically.

That's the intent of my motion. I'm willing to hear suggested changes or improvements, or something that people might be able to agree to. I don't think anyone here, because we're all familiar with it and have heard aboriginal witnesses, thinks the healing is complete. That's the introduction to the motion.

● (1710)

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Crowder, then Mr. Duncan.

Go ahead, Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I don't know how we would go about doing this, but I wonder if we even have enough information to talk about this today given some of the things the department talked about. I mean, there's a lack of clarity around it. There seems to be some dispute about the amount of money that's available through Health Canada. I think it's difficult to judge what the mandate of Health Canada is with regard to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation projects, and I didn't get a clear answer from the department around whether they've actually assessed the impact.

I know that sort of feeds into what Mr. Bagnell is talking about in terms of doing a study, but I wonder if we can even scope this out until we get a bit more information from the department. I don't know how many of us have had an opportunity to actually look at the Aboriginal Healing Foundation report that they tabled in the House this week. I actually haven't looked at it.

I just wonder if there's a way that we could ask for some information from the department before we fully consider this motion, because so many things are up in the air with it right now.

The Chair: In terms of procedure, of course, the motion has been moved. It could be withdrawn by the mover pending further developments. We did that at the last meeting.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Procedurally, can we table it pending some information from the department?

The Chair: Essentially it would take another motion to that effect.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I'll hold off on that for now.

The Chair: Okay.

Let's go to Mr. Duncan.

Mr. John Duncan: Just a question for the chair. Is the motion to table it debatable?

The Chair: I don't know that it is. No, it is not debatable. It essentially would suspend debate on the motion.

I'll just quickly check with the clerk here on that. I'm tapping my brain here. Just a moment.

Mr. John Duncan: A question for Larry, I guess.

The Chair: We're going to check on your question, Mr. Duncan. So why don't you go ahead with your second question to Mr. Bagnell.

Mr. John Duncan: Just in terms of the wording of the motion, it's pretty all-encompassing. Especially in the latter part of the motion, it's talking about bringing in aboriginal leaders and affected families.

In each and every case where we're getting motions coming forward from the opposition, they're casting a very wide net and then expecting us to somehow deal with it in two or three hours. It's not a realistic expectation to be able to call that number of witnesses. I'm just wondering if you could pare it down, number one.

Number two, we did talk about if we're really going to entertain these motions, then we're going to entertain them outside of Tuesday and Thursday, 3:30 to 5:30. We're already up to 3:30 to 6:30, or some such thing, on Tuesdays, before we've even entertained these extra motions.

I wouldn't mind hearing a response to those questions.

I'd like to keep the option open that we table this thing. Is it possible for me to keep the option open, pending a response?

● (1715)

The Chair: I don't know if I got all of that last question, but the answer to your first question is yes, you can put forth a motion to postpone debate on the motion that's in front of us right now to a specific date—it's not debatable—and then we could take it up at that time.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: I'll put forward that motion, then, that we postpone debate.

The Chair: Shall we say next Thursday, which is March 25?

Mr. Marc Lemay: At 3:30.

The Chair: At 3:30.

All in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: There being no other immediate business in front of the committee, the meeting is adjourned.

Merci beaucoup.

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